

choice

APRIL 2009 • WWW.CHOICE.COM.AU

**Buying shares**

The plunging market is a bargain hunter's paradise, but look before you leap.

**Marketing tricks**

If you think you're immune to advertising, check out the industry's latest tactics.

On test

- + Clothes dryers
- + Compact & bridge cameras
- + Gas cooktops
- + Handheld vacuums
- + Printers
- + Headphones
- + High chairs

Domestic airlines

The best and the rest – what members say

Why the CPRS fails consumers

The minefield of supermarket cake additives

Nut allergies are on the rise

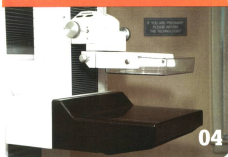
Event ticketing – same show, same seat, different price!



**158 PRODUCTS
RATED!**

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Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au

"CHOICE it" before you buy it

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Because we pay full price for the products we test, we can remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry – our only aim is to give consumers the best possible information about buying products and services. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is funded by subscriptions to our magazines and CHOICE Online, and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers.

We have laboratories in Marrickville, Sydney, that test everything from juicers to plasma TVs, coffee grinders to MP3 players and air conditioners. We test hundreds of products every year. There's no hidden agenda to our testing – we simply road-test products so that consumers like you don't get ripped off. CHOICE ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys.

CHOICE also has staff who research a wide range of consumer services – everything from the financial industry to the organic food business, supermarket practices to drug companies and pharmacies. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

CHOICE has also always campaigned about consumer goods and services that affect your life. We lobby government and regulators on behalf of all consumers in Australia. CHOICE was established in 1959 and is a not-for-profit, non-party-political organisation.

BEST BUY

CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.

GREEN BUY

CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.



CHOICE Video When you see the CHOICE Video icon, you can find more information about that story at www.choice.com.au.

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Comment

Consumer anguish over CPRS



Over the next few months, the Climate Change Bill will be argued in federal parliament. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme White Paper, released in December 2008, announced weaker targets than expected of only 5% to 15% (depending on international agreements),

while also committing almost \$4 billion to support coal industries.

Here at CHOICE we welcome ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the development of an emissions trading scheme as important first steps in moving towards a low carbon economy. However, we are concerned with the low target and many of the details of the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS).

There is no doubt the CPRS will increase ordinary consumers' costs across most products, particularly electricity, by about 1.1%. The Rudd government has done well to propose a \$6 billion short-term assistance package for low- and some middle-income households to help with the initial increased costs, but it is yet to outline details of an integrated long-term strategy to assist all households to become more energy efficient.

In addition, under the scheme any voluntary action taken by households will be counted towards the mandatory targets of business. This means that the 800,000 households across Australia who currently purchase GreenPower, or have recently installed solar panels, are simply spending their money to make carbon emissions reductions cheaper for big business.

CHOICE is concerned with the design of the scheme and we believe the government has failed to offer consumers a strong vision for change. You need to know how you, your family and community can contribute meaningfully to Australia's carbon reduction – as well as be provided with incentives and support to make your household more energy efficient.

To find out more, read Off Target, page 20, and to have your say on the government's CPRS and see how it might affect you, visit www.choice.com.au/green.

Anny Friis
Publisher

On test

- 46 + Compact & bridge cameras** Smaller than SLRs, most of these compact and bridge models still take a good shot.
- 50 + Gas cooktops** Steer clear of those that don't come with flame failure protection.
- 54 + Handheld vacuums** They're handy and perform well, but are still very noisy.
- 57 + Multifunction printers** Spend more upfront to save on long-term costs.
- 58 + Wireless headphones** Sound quality is sacrificed for greater portability.
- 60 + High chairs** See which are the safest and most sturdily built chairs for your baby.



DRYERS
PAGE 42

CHOICEextra.com.au This free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers is an index of articles from Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs.

CHOICE Plus Get the magazine plus full online access when you upgrade your membership for just \$11.50 per quarter (usually \$21.95 for online membership). Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and follow the prompts.

HEALTH

Cancer research updates

While there's concern about older women missing out on breast cancer screening, there's hope for a less invasive prostate cancer test for men.

Breast cancer Women aged over 69 years are failing to access free breast cancer screening, according to recent research, because they no longer receive regular reminder letters, despite 26% of all new breast cancer cases occurring in this age group.

In 2004-2005, only 11% of women over 69 participated in the national BreastScreen Australia program, compared with 74% of women in the target age range of 50-69. This decline has occurred over a decade, according to the study, *By Invitation Only – The Case for Breast Cancer Screening Reminders for Women Over 69 Years*.

There is now enough data to support a change in the maximum target age range, according to experts writing in the *Australia and New Zealand Health Policy*. This would, says CHOICE Health Policy Officer, Michael Johnston, give those women the opportunity to assess the risks and benefits of screening and decide what is best for them.

"Breast cancer detected early in women over 70 can be successfully treated and enable them to continue living actively for many years," says Johnston. The study notes that a woman who reaches age 70 in Australia can, on average, expect to live another 15 years.

Women aged 70 or older are not invited or actively encouraged to get a breast cancer screen, as is done with women aged between 50 and 69 years, who are targeted by recruitment strategies such as regular advertising and biannual screening invitations.

BreastScreen Australia is the national breast cancer screening program, which has been offering free mammography screening to asymptomatic women since 1991. Johnston says prompts to continue breast cancer screening have been shown to increase participation and save lives. "The growing number of women in Australia living past 70 suggests it is time to increase the targeted upper age for breast cancer screening," he says. "A simple letter could enable more women to live a long, healthy and productive life."



Prostate cancer Recent research findings, published in *Nature*, offer hope for a simple urine test that can detect whether a man has prostate cancer, and also how advanced it is. In a study of samples from 110 men (59 with and 51 without prostate cancer), a metabolite produced by the cancer cells was identified and the level linked to how aggressive the cancer was and how far it had progressed. The highest levels were found in cases where the cancer had spread from the prostate to other parts of the body.

Using this information, doctors may be able to develop a simple, inexpensive screening test to give a clear indication of whether you have the disease and how dangerous it is, without using a painful and invasive biopsy.

Current screening tests for prostate cancer leave a lot to be desired. A blood test measures prostate specific antigen (PSA), but an increased level doesn't necessarily mean a patient definitely has the cancer. In fact, six in 10 men with an abnormal level are later found not to have it. The alternative, a digital rectal examination which can be confronting for some men, also isn't 100% accurate, as the doctor cannot feel all of the prostate and may not detect a growth until it is more advanced. The two tests are often used together, but a biopsy (usually under anaesthetic) is needed to confirm whether you're in the clear or not. ■

'It is time to increase the targeted upper age for breast cancer screening.'



CHOICE FORUM OF THE MONTH

Pharmacy Diet Plans Our investigation into pharmacy diet plans (CHOICE, Feb 2009) generated quite a response from consumers as well as pharmacy industry associations. Go to www.choice.com.au/pharmdietplans to read what members say about their experiences with these diet plans. Our findings confirm these diet plans, if followed closely, will help shed kilos in record time, but most fail to deal effectively with the complex broader issues around weight loss. And this is what many readers have highlighted. In the past 20 years, the number of people with a weight problem has doubled; about 60% of Australian adults are overweight or obese, and we're on track to reach 70% by 2010.



A new website promises you better information about mobile premium services. But will it deliver?

A new online consumer guide to mobile premium services (MPS), www.19sms.com.au, has been launched by the industry group Communications Alliance. The site has a 19 Service Finder that can be used to find the name of the content provider, charges and a contact phone number – useful information if you are disputing charges or having problems unsubscribing. The site also has information on how to unsubscribe to stop receiving content, as well as fact sheets, a jargon buster and links to service provider and industry websites.

Mobile premium services, such as ringtones, games, horoscopes, news, music, competitions and other content are accessed via SMS and MMS using 19 numbers. They are charged at a higher rate and often include automatic subscriptions with ongoing charges.

Complaints about mobile premium services are on the rise. Marketing gives consumers unclear or inadequate detail about costs and it is sometimes difficult to unsubscribe from these services. The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman reports more than 22,000 consumers lodged complaints about MPS in the 12 months to June 2008.

CHOICE awarded a 2008 Shonky Award to the MPS industry for poor practices such as tricking people into subscriptions they don't want and can't get out of. We want the industry to significantly improve codes of practice to ensure consumers aren't ripped off.

+ LIFE INSURANCE

You can now take out life insurance online in less than 10 minutes, but you may be paying dearly for it.

Life insurance policies are now available online direct from the insurance company. Application and approval is quick and easy; no medical assessment or blood test is required. But life insurance broker Lifebroker warns some of these policies are very expensive compared with fully underwritten life insurance (death cover) policies usually sold through a broker or financial planner.

Fully underwritten policies are more difficult to take out as they usually involve filling out a health and medical questionnaire and sometimes undergoing a medical assessment.

A price survey undertaken by Lifebroker found that the premium for a 30-year-old non-smoking couple for a sum insured of \$500,000 can range from about \$590 to about \$1280 among five companies selling life insurance directly. While the cheapest policy is not much more expensive than a fully underwritten policy, you would be getting a very bad deal with the most expensive one.

Alternatively you can take out life insurance through your super fund. A recent *CHOICE* report (March, 2009) found this is the

19 SMS

your guide to mobile premium services



- Name
- WHAT is it?
- HOW does it work?
- HOW do I get it?
- HOW do I PART?
- HOW do I STOP?
- HOW do I get HELP?
- Price
- 18 SMS Jargon Buster
- Useful Links
- 18 SMS Pack Sheet

Mobile Premium Services or 1-9 SMS Services are information and entertainment services that deliver various forms of content to your mobile phone. These services are created by a content supplier and delivered over your mobile service provider network. They are called 'Mobile Premium Services' because you buy them using your mobile phone, you receive them on your mobile phone, and you will be charged a premium cost for them.



18 Service Finder

U.S. Number

Submit [more links](#)

A new industry code is being developed to provide stricter rules for MPS providers, including a requirement for consumers to send two messages, known as a "double opt-in", before any service begins. It also includes tighter controls on advertising and better procedures for handling requests to opt out of services. Once the code is registered with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) it will be enforceable by law. Reports will be available when it has been accepted by ACMA.

While we're pleased to see a code being drafted, we're not happy with the process for making decisions about this and other codes, particularly the way consumer views are sought and incorporated into code development. We're also concerned there may not be effective provisions for monitoring code breaches.

CHOICE's submission on the code argued for important improvements and is available online at www.choice.com.au/telecommunications, along with a report on how code development in the communications industry is letting consumers down. ■

+ LIFE INSURANCE

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Alternatively you can take out life insurance through your super fund. A recent *CHOICE* report (March, 2009) found this is the

cheapest way to take out life insurance – since your fund buys insurance in bulk, they can pass the savings to you.

So when taking out life insurance, check the following.

- What is the sum insured and is it appropriate for your needs? GIO's direct policy only offers cover up to \$400,000, while the direct policy from Allianz offers up to \$1.5 million. You may be able to get higher amounts through a life insurance broker.
- What are the exclusions? Some exclude pre-existing conditions.
- Will the premium stay the same or will it increase each year? Some policies significantly increase their costs as you get older.
- If you take insurance through your super fund, make sure the cover continues even if you switch funds. Most companies allow this but may charge a higher premium as the policy converts to a fully underwritten one when you leave a super fund.

For more information and sample premiums, see our feature on credit protection insurance in *CHOICE*, March 2009, or go to www.choice.com.au/money. ■

+ HOME INSURANCE

Industry calls for review

Increasing floods and fires signal a changing climate, but are our homes built to withstand the onslaught?

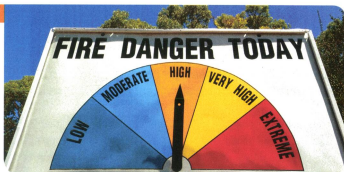
Victoria's recent bushfires have sparked much debate about the suitability of Australian housing standards in an environment increasingly subject to extreme weather conditions. The Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) is calling for changes to our building codes to allow for a minimum level of property resistance to hazards such as floods and fires.

In its submission to a government review of building codes, the ICA claims Australia is lagging behind Europe and the US for minimum design standards, and that our "brittle" buildings will be increasingly difficult to insure.

The concerns are shared by Robert Caulfield, Managing Director of Archicentre (the Australian Institute of Architects' building advisory service), who cites the drought and recent heatwaves in Melbourne as signs of a rapidly changing climate. "The reality is that the insurance premiums in these high-risk areas could go up and people could be discouraged from building in them – but maybe that's what has to happen," he says.

Problems outlined in the ICA's submission include roofing and window standards that don't acknowledge the impact of hail; a construction standard that only prevents collapse and not severe damage in high winds; and a lack of minimum requirements to limit damage in fire and flood-prone areas.

"If national building codes remain the same as they are today, and the incidence of extreme weather events does



increase as predicted, some regions will find themselves exposed to weather that their current building standards were not designed to withstand," says Sean Sampson from the ICA. "This increases the risk posed to the dwelling by incidents of extreme weather."

The ICA is urging government to strengthen building codes for homes built in fire-prone areas so they are more resilient to the threat of bushfire. "If the resilience level of a dwelling remains low then the insurer is taking on a higher level of risk to offer insurance for the property," says Sampson. "Ultimately, if an insurer deems a risk too extreme they may choose not to offer insurance covering it, but this would be a commercial decision by the individual insurer."

The Victorian government has introduced tougher building standards for homes, bringing forward the adoption of a national standard for design and construction in bushfire-prone areas, which was set for 2010. Under the new standards, every new home built in Victoria will be categorised with a bushfire attack level, which ranges from low to extreme in six stages. The cost to homeowners to meet the new standards could reach up to \$22,000 in extreme levels. ■

+ HEALTH

A spot of trouble ahead?

While measles is under control in Australia, it still pays to be vigilant.

Australia has been declared measles-free, with less than one case per million people annually in recent years. The few cases that do pop up each year are largely among non-immune travellers who bring the virus home from overseas. But despite this, health authorities are warning of possible outbreaks after several cases were reported in Victoria earlier this year. Infants under 12 months, unimmunised children and adults aged 26-42 (who received one rather than two shots), and the chronically ill are most at risk.

Babies receive the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine at 12 months old, with a booster at four years. Measles vaccination rates among toddlers are currently about 93%, dropping to 86% for fully vaccinated children. Adults aged over 42 are considered immune, with most having had the disease as children (mass immunisation began in 1966). Younger adults should consider getting a booster.

In England, where in 1998 the media beat up an unproven link between the MMR vaccine and autism, vaccination rates dropped to 80%. Measles cases increased from 56 to 1348 in the decade to 2008 and children died from it. An extensive review by the World Health Organisation in 2003 discredited the MMR-autism link. Early in 2009 the US Court of Federal Claims came to the same conclusion.

The disease is so rare today many younger doctors may not recognise it. How do you know if you have it? Symptoms start similarly to those of the common cold, with fever, sore throat, sore eyes and a cough. A spotty rash appears a few days later, usually on the face followed by the rest of the body. It can develop serious complications, including pneumonia, encephalitis and fatal brain damage. If you think you may have measles, don't simply turn up at a hospital or doctor's surgery. Phone ahead, so staff can ensure you're isolated. ■

+ SUPERANNUATION

The flight to cash

Investors are switching in droves from shares to safer options, but timing is critical.

Superannuation's disaster year has prompted many fund members to abandon balanced and growth options in preference for more conservative cash and fixed interest funds, but they could be unwittingly "crystallising their losses", according to financial institutions and advisers. Up to one-third of some super fund members have switched to more conservative cash and fixed interest funds, which is not surprising, given that in 2008 the Australian share market declined by 39%, listed property took a 55% nose dive and many balanced super funds, where most people are invested, lost about 20%.

"Investors are switching for short-term gains, but they also need to think about the long term," warns Chris Kotsiopoulos, an adviser with Industry Funds Financial Planning (IFFP). One of the country's largest retail fund managers, MLC, cautions against "irrational" investment decisions that lock in investment losses. The Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia stated in December that "it's important members of funds stay in their current investment portfolio, so they can obtain the benefit when the value recovers".

Frank Gayton, Head of IFFP, takes a different view. "I have no difficulty with clients switching to cash. Some people are saying the superannuation declines are only paper losses. No – they're real losses – this is real money. If you've suffered a loss and are close to retirement, you should get advice about your situation pretty urgently."

Of course, switching investments can work; if you anticipated 2008's financial meltdown, shifting money from a balanced to a cash fund would have left you about 30% better off. But the challenge is in knowing when to switch. If you sell out of shares, can you predict the right time, if any, to get back in? Selling at the worst time (when markets are low) could mean missing the market's biggest rebounds. On the other hand, share markets could continue to decline.

Before deciding what, if anything, to do, consider getting licensed advice. Investors' decisions should be based on personal needs and circumstances. The federal government introduced changes allowing super funds to provide limited financial advice over the phone, covering issues such as the difference between investment options and the implications of switching funds. This helps fill what many believe is a gaping hole in the financial advice market. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission provides information on choosing a financial planner, at www.fido.gov.au. ■



Before deciding whether to switch, consider getting licensed financial advice.

In brief

Recycling print cartridges

As part of its national campaign, Cartridges 4



Planet Ark's annual recycling day is 22 April. So far, the campaign has diverted more than nine million cartridges from landfill into recycling. Specially marked recycling boxes are in many stores. Go to www.cartridges.planetark.org or call 1800 242 473 for drop-off points.

Weight loss surgery

Medicare data shows an average annual increase of 40% in gastric banding and bypass surgery since 2006. While it may leave patients a few thousand dollars out of pocket, costs could be recouped relatively quickly through savings in medication and food. The trend has been partly attributed to the popularity of weight loss and makeover TV shows, and hasn't yet been adversely affected by the economic downturn.

Too much to gain

During menopause, women often add a few centimetres to their waistline, despite unchanged eating habits. A recently published paper reports that one reason is a sudden drop in activity levels, to half their pre-menopausal levels. Lack of oestrogen is a possible culprit for the lethargy. To avoid heart disease and diabetes associated with weight gain, authorities urge women to exercise more and eat less as they reach menopause.

CLARIFICATION SHADECLOTH, FEBRUARY 2009

In the image on page 18, we stated that a fabric "claims 'UV Extrablock'", but the manufacturer has informed us Extrablock is the brand name and claims "maximum protection against harmful UVR rays" on the product and 95.5% UVR protection in its brochure.

GPS CAMERA

Picturing the location

Along with sharp, clear images, this camera also captures your geographical location for posterity.



NIKON Coolpix P6000



Price \$750

Weight 269g

Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)

107mm x 66mm x 42mm

Megapixels 13.5

Optical zoom 4x

35mm equivalent 28mm-112mm

Contact www.nikon.com.au

The Coolpix embeds the longitude and latitude of your location onto each photo you take.

We've seen GPS devices that can update continuously, show where the user has been and give directions, but what about a product that tags photos with the location?

Nikon has released the Coolpix P6000 for anyone interested in "geotagging" — where photos are tagged as you take them. Using inbuilt GPS technology, the camera embeds the longitude and latitude of your location onto each photo. It also comes with a network connection that you can hook up straight to your ADSL router (with some tweaking) to upload photos to Nikon's website.

After charging the camera and turning on the GPS (default mode is off), we walked around our local park to see if it's as easy to work as it sounds. It took a couple of minutes

to find a signal, then lost it for some of our pictures as the camera automatically shuts down after a minute. Altering this setting to a longer shutdown time improved its performance. Once you've installed the software, plus a 50MB download, you can integrate the photos with GPS data into Google Maps via the Nikon software, which places pinpoints for all the places you've taken photos. Unfortunately, the GPS data in the photos can't be used for online photo sites, such as Picasa or Flickr, other than Nikon's own (www.mypicturetown.com). However, membership is free, as is 2GB of storage. As for the Ethernet connection, it can only be used for uploading to Nikon's website.

As a camera, the Coolpix is a solid performer, has intuitive controls and no discernible shutter lag, and the GPS feature does not intrude on its performance.

CHOICE VERDICT

If you would like to smoothly integrate the Coolpix into your online photo collection, you may be disappointed. But if you are happy to use the 2GB of complimentary storage, you could be pleased with the results of this geotagging device. ■

ONLINE STORAGE

Backup, backup

Automatically store your precious files securely offsite for peace of mind.

Are all your important computer files safely backed up, right this very minute? If this thought gives you even a twinge of anxiety, it's time to do something about it. Even if you backup regularly to a local hard drive, you may still lose vital information in the event of flood, fire or theft. Offsite backup is a standard strategy for IT professionals, and one consumers should also consider.

This is where online back-up solutions such as Carbonite come in. Carbonite is like a carbon copy for all your important files, which are backed up over the internet and stored safely in a secure online repository to which only you have access. Once backed up safely in "the cloud" they cannot be destroyed by natural disasters.

The Carbonite online back-up service claims two notable firsts: unlimited back-up storage and a simple flat-rate subscription fee of less than \$6 per month.

In practice, because of internet speed and ISP plan limitations, most people will back up only their most important files online, but even this can add up to several gigabytes of information. So the initial online backup can take hours, if not days. But after that, Carbonite adds only new or different information to your online backup — quickly, automatically and unobtrusively.

All backed-up files are double encrypted before being copied to the Carbonite file server. And if you accidentally delete a file from your local PC, you still have up to 30 days to recover it before it disappears off the server.

You can download a free 30-day trial from the Australian website (see below).

CHOICE VERDICT

Everyone with a PC should have a solid back-up strategy that includes regular backups to a local hard drive or optical discs. But backing up automatically offsite to a secure online server is also well worth considering.

For the full story on Carbonite, see the March/April 2009 issue of *CHOICE Computer*. To subscribe, call

1800 069 552 (toll-free) or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines. ■

CARBONITE



Price Less than \$6 per month.

Contact www.carbonite.com.au



+ NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER

Internet radio goes mobile

Play internet radio or your own music files wirelessly or over an Ethernet connection.



LOGITECH Squeezebox Boom



Price \$649

Dimensions (mm, W x H x D)

330 x 127 x 79mm

Contact www.logitech.com

The Logitech Squeezebox Boom is made for constantly connected people, streaming music either over the internet or from a personal computer. Resembling a large clock radio, the Squeezebox has a subdued design with a piano-black finish and two speakers on either side of an auto-dimming aqua display for time, song title and radio station details. An auxiliary input for connecting an iPod or other media player, as well as a headphone port that doubles as a subwoofer connection, adds to its versatility. As an alarm clock, the Squeezebox is extremely easy to set up, use and set to "sleep" mode so it automatically turns off.

The SqueezeCentre application, loaded onto a PC, Mac or Linux computer, allows you to perform many tasks, including search for music stored anywhere on your computer or network and select online radio stations and podcasts. You can also subscribe to various music services that allow you to either download music or store your collection online. The web-based interface is simple to use and allows you to customise how your Squeezebox screen looks and operates.

Another connection option is the SqueezeNetwork, where you can listen to music online even if you don't have a computer operating. All you

need is broadband internet access and to select "SqueezeNetwork" in the menu.

The Squeezebox delivers surprisingly good sound for its size and can play most popular music file formats, including MP3, WAV, AAC and AIFF. Until recently, the Squeezebox couldn't play music bought from Apple's iTunes site because of digital rights management issues. Thankfully, this restriction has now been lifted.

The Squeezebox works very well over a wireless network, allowing you to place the unit anywhere in an average-sized house, and it also has an Ethernet connection if wireless access is not available. It won't receive local radio stations via a standard AM/FM antenna, however most local stations are available online.

CHOICE VERDICT

For the price, the Squeezebox Boom would want to do much more than simply wake you up in the morning with a buzzer or radio station – and it does. If you keep your music on your PC and also enjoy listening to internet radio, the Squeezebox will quickly become part of your daily routine. Once you've followed the series of steps to set up the unit it's easy to use and move, and delivers surprisingly good sound in a compact package. ■

If you enjoy listening to internet radio, the Squeezebox could soon become part of your daily routine.

Coming

Garden lights

Although some improvements have been made in solar garden lights since CHOICE last tested them, more work is still needed before they can be considered anything other than decorative. We compare solar lights with 12V models.



Refrigerators

Some fridges are still being put out into the market labelled with energy claims that differ from their actual performance. Find out which models are the best buys in each size range as well as which have a good fresh food cooling speed to combat harmful toxins and bacteria.



Car GPS

A GPS device should not be a substitute for your personal judgment and common sense when driving. While most perform well, none we tested were correct all of the time and most could improve in locations beyond the major cities. We've found some inexpensive models that work equally as well as ones that cost hundreds of dollars more.

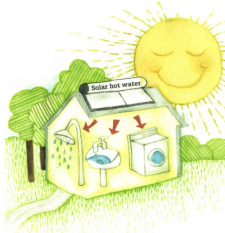




Email or write – we want to hear from you.

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. See opposite for how to contact us.

Superheated solar



■ Your article on solar hot water systems (www.choice.com.au and search for 'solar') provided some helpful advice. I had an evacuated tube system installed in November. Alas, I was ignorant at that stage of the perils of oversizing the system.

I asked for a system that would reduce my electric hot water bills to almost zero, at which point the salesman should have pointed out that solar hot water systems aim to be almost self-sufficient on sunny summer days but provide significantly less output at other times. The manual that came with the system explains that it's normal for a system to provide only 20% of heating requirements in winter. Presumably the salesman didn't tell me this as he assumed (correctly) I would question whether solar heating was worth the effort.

So, unknown to me at the time, a seriously oversized system was installed on my roof. On sunny days, when the hot water was turned on, the tank and plumbing shook dramatically and the house rumbled like an earthquake. At first the supplier tried to reassure me this was normal, and that many customers were reporting this problem. But after

a few more phone calls they replaced my controller with a better one that was successful in preventing the tank from overheating. It soon became evident that for many hours on sunny days the manifold on the roof was reaching temperatures well over 200°C.

Until this problem is solved, on every sunny day I'm pouring half an hour's worth of hot water down the drain. I'm not looking forward to my next water bill – perhaps I should have offered free showers to the homeless over Christmas?

Graham Meale, via email

CHOICE says *If you're having a solar hot water system installed it's very important the supplier fully understands your requirements and designs the system accordingly. North Coast Power and Water, which supplied Graham's system, told us the system was suitable for a house the size of Graham's with normal hot water usage, but not Graham's low hot water usage and the fact that he's away for extended periods.*

The managing director claimed Graham hadn't explained his particular circumstances when he bought the system, however we believe North Coast Power and Water must take some responsibility for not getting the full story from him. Consequently, it has changed its policy to now ask how many people are in the house.

The manufacturer, Apricus, confirmed the system is too big for Graham's hot water requirements but the high temperatures are perfectly normal as the system is designed to heat the tank to 70°C before turning off the pump. The rumbling in the roof is caused by too many elbows and bends in the roof's plumbing system, and can be fixed.

Security risk

■ My mum has just started doing our family tree at an online website. I told her she is creating a security risk for all of us because the website asks for dates of birth of family members, places of birth, maiden names, names of brothers and sisters, addresses – all information that can assist identity theft if a hacker were to break into the site.

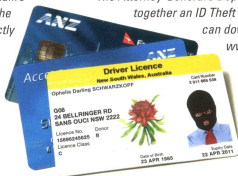
Members of a family are emailed and have a password to obtain the information, but to the best of my knowledge there is no way of tracking who receives access to the site. If this information got into the wrong hands there could be problems. How safe are these family history sites, and what is CHOICE's opinion of them?

Hana Barker, via email

CHOICE says *Your concerns are valid. Family history websites can pose a security risk, just like social networking sites. You should take all possible safety precautions when publishing information online to make sure you don't give away information that can be used in identity theft or fraud.*

The same holds true for any websites that ask for personal information, including genealogy sites.

The key is not to provide detailed information such as addresses, dates of birth and so on, that can be used to specifically identify a living person. The Attorney-General's Department has put together an ID Theft Kit, which you can download from www.ag.gov.au.



Thumbs up!



■ CHOICE staff member, Alister Sharp (left) of Hunters Hill, NSW, is very impressed with NRMA Insurance, who processed the write-off of his car simply and quickly. Then, while arranging insurance for a replacement vehicle, they noticed he hadn't been receiving a "years of membership" discount for his other car. They sent a refund of \$740, covering the entire period from when he took out the policy.

■ Phil McMaster gives a big thumbs up to Sports Authority in Launceston. He bought a pair of running shoes that turned out to

be unsuitable, but the store replaced them free of charge, even after he'd run a 10km race in them.

■ Gerd Kircher of Macgregor, Qld, is very impressed with Canon, who replaced his faulty PowerShot A75 digital camera, even though it was more than three years old and out of warranty.

■ Frank Faber of Pelican, NSW, would like to thank Breville for replacing an out-of-warranty broken kettle with a newer model. They dispatched it by courier from Sydney without charge.

Address your letters to **Thumbs up!** at the address below.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Faulty phone, faulty service

■ As an alert to other CHOICE readers, I would like to share the following story. When I tried to exchange a brand new but faulty mobile phone for one that worked, the assistant in the Telstra Shop told me it is Telstra policy not to exchange faulty equipment if it is not returned within 24 hours of purchase, and there was nothing the store could do to waive this policy. The phone would have to be sent away for repair – for a period of time they could not specify – before they could replace it. I pointed out that nowhere in the store was there a notice advising customers of this policy, and the assistant had not mentioned it to my husband when he bought the phone, nor was it in the small print in the contract. But the assistant would not budge.

I asked to see the manager, who was not in.



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See overleaf
for details

the policy. I
I wanted
the manager
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quality and
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It's the
off

Come fly with us

In the era of bargain travel, convenience and value are king when it comes to booking a domestic flight, our CHOICE survey found.



nutshell

- ▶ Frequent flyer programs still figure as strong reasons for selecting a domestic airline, but value for money is the clincher.
- ▶ Qantas is still Australia's most commonly used domestic airline, despite losing ground with consumers.
- ▶ Virgin Blue is now rated best airline overall for satisfaction.

Since Tiger Airways became Australia's third budget airline in late 2007, domestic air travel has never been more affordable. With return airfares between some capitals now costing less than \$50, including taxes, flying interstate is often cheaper than driving.

Greater competition among domestic airlines is pushing prices down. But consumers still expect a reasonable standard of service, among other things, to rate an airline as providing "value for money".

CHOICE's recent survey of more than 4200 respondents who had flown on domestic airlines in the past three years found 40% cite value for money as a factor in their choice of airline – the same percentage as our last survey published nearly two years ago (see

CHOICE, June 2007). About 32% say frequent flyer points are important, followed by 28% who say flight schedules are a reason they choose an airline.

Choosing a carrier

Qantas still dominates the skies, with about half the survey respondents flying with the national carrier despite rating its value for money worse now than in 2007, when it was rated the second least satisfactory overall in the domestic market. Fewer respondents choose to fly with Qantas for its safety record than in our previous survey, possibly a fallout from its recent spate of mechanical mishaps (see What Members Say, page 15). Its frequent flyer scheme remains its major competitive advantage.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING DOMESTIC AIRLINE

Airline (in alphabetical order; followed by number of respondents with 2007 number in brackets)	Good standard of service (%)	Easy to book (%)	Frequent flyer points (%)	Had flown with airline before (%)	Best schedule of flights (%)*	Safety record (%)	Value for money (%)
Jetstar 641 (482)	7 [6]	20 [23]	6 [8]	4 [3]	31	2 [2]	65 [62]
Qantas 2095 (1858)	29 [38]	23 [26]	54 [56]	25 [28]	26	17 [22]	12 [14]
Regional Express 104 (67)	19 [25]	14 [27]	9 [12]	13 [16]	33	5 [6]	19 [22]
Tiger 82 (A)	6	11	-	-	6	2	89
Virgin Blue 1311 (1069)	30 [27]	39 [42]	13 [9]	15 [15]	30	7 [3]	73 [76]

USING THE TABLE

Respondents were asked why they chose the domestic airline they last flew with and were provided with a list of reasons from which they could choose all that applied. Numbers in square brackets indicate 2007 survey results.

Percentages of respondents who chose each option are shown in the table.

TABLE NOTES

* This question was not included in the 2007 survey.

(A) Tiger Airways was not included in the 2007 survey.

DOMESTIC AIRLINE SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

Airline (in order of overall satisfaction; followed by number of respondents with 2007 number in brackets)	Overall satisfaction (%)	Value for money (%)	In-flight service (%)	Seat comfort (%)	Ability to get a convenient flight (%)	Booking process (%) *
Virgin Blue 1201 (437)	68 [71]	74 [77]	67 [68]	61 [63]	73 [76]	81 [83]
Regional Express 87 (50)	66 [79]	54 [63]	73 [76]	64 [67]	67 [70]	80 [83]
Qantas 1832 (1345)	61 [67]	55 [57]	61 [64]	53 [56]	67 [70]	75 [77]
Jetstar 579 (171)	60 [62]	70 [73]	58 [58]	56 [58]	64 [66]	76 [76]
Tiger 74 (A)	55	75	59	52	58	71
Average scores	63 [68]	64 [66]	63 [65]	56 [59]	68 [71]	77 [79]

USING THE TABLE

Respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were across a range of attributes, with percentage ratings given in the table. The numbers in square brackets indicate the results for the 2007 survey.

TABLE NOTES

(A) Tiger Airways was not included in the 2007 survey.

* Slightly fewer respondents answered this question.

Virgin Blue (VB) is nominated best airline overall for economy class, rating significantly above average on most counts, including value for money, seat comfort and booking process (see table above). Of the respondents who chose to fly VB, only 13% say they were lured by its frequent flyer program, compared with 54% for Qantas – but unlike Qantas, VB's loyalty program is attracting increasing numbers.

No-frills airlines remain popular with bargain hunters, who appear willing to compromise on service. Nearly 90% of respondents who flew with Tiger Airways nominated value for money as a reason – the highest of any airline. This was despite a below-average overall satisfaction rating. Jetstar also gets the thumbs up for value for money, but scored significantly less than VB for overall satisfaction. It was nudged up from bottom place by Tiger.

The battered kangaroo

Qantas' frequent flyer scheme is still the chief reason respondents flew with the carrier. While standard of service is another, it appears to have slipped since our 2007 survey. Fewer respondents chose Qantas

for its standard of service (29%, down from 38%), and respondents who say they would "definitely" recommend Qantas to others fell from 46% last survey to 39%.

Force of habit is another reason respondents opt for Qantas. Australians' familiarity with the flying kangaroo helped it retain market share over Jetstar and VB, even though the number of respondents who chose Qantas is slightly down overall compared with our 2007 survey.

Our Airline Satisfaction Survey table, above, shows Qantas' continuing fall from grace. All its scores are below average for economy class. A series of mechanical mishaps appears to have reduced confidence in the airline's safety record over the past two years, with the survey showing 17% of respondents chose to fly Qantas domestically because of its safety record, compared with 22% in 2007. Even though it doesn't trade on its safety record, Qantas has been perceived as one of the safest airlines since its mention in the 1988 movie *Rain Man*.

A Qantas spokesperson defended the airline's poor rating with respondents, telling CHOICE that "Australians have extremely high expectations of Qantas". She says operations were significantly affected last year by industrial action by some of the airline's engineers, "but we are now back to the industry-leading punctuality we were achieving before the action began".

On the safety issue, the spokesperson concedes Qantas "did experience a small number of in-flight incidents that generated significant media coverage".



Not feeling so Blue

Virgin Blue topped the survey for overall satisfaction, with 74% who had flown with the airline commending its

value for money. Since its entry into the Australian market in 2000 with only two aircraft, it has expanded its fleet to at least 68, with flights to 27 domestic locations weekly. The airline has also captured more than 31% of the domestic market – a claim reflected in both our 2007 and current survey. >



Convenient flight schedules and ease of booking are now more important reasons for consumers to choose a domestic airline than standard of service.

< Among its high rankings for nearly every attribute (see Reasons for Choosing a Domestic Airline, page 12), staff service in particular figured as a strong reason for choosing VB. The friendly crew and quirky in-flight entertainment by crew drew favourable comments, with the exception of a handful who find the on-board banter irritating (see What Members Say, opposite).

Complaints about delayed flights, poor legroom and having to pay for extra baggage seemed to be offset by VB's service and Velocity Rewards frequent flyer program, with 57% of passengers saying they would definitely recommend the airline to others.



Jetstar or dimmed star?

Launched by Qantas in 2004 as a low-cost domestic competitor to VB, Jetstar rated well for value for money, but little else. Its service standard does not figure highly as a reason for choosing the budget airline, but 65% nominated value for money as an incentive.

Only 33% who flew Jetstar's domestic service say they would "definitely" recommend the airline to others – the lowest of all domestic carriers in this survey.



Toothless Tiger

Just 2% of our survey respondents flew with Tiger Airways, which operates routes from every capital city except Sydney, Darwin and Brisbane (although it does fly to the Gold Coast from Adelaide and Melbourne). It has the lowest overall satisfaction score for economy flights and respondents do not find its flight schedules particularly convenient, but they overwhelmingly choose the airline for its value for money.

In fact, it is one of the only reasons respondents selected the carrier. Tiger has in the past offered one-way flights between Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart starting from \$19.95, including taxes (but excluding additional baggage costs).

However, such bargain flights come at a cost – only 40% of respondents who flew with Tiger said they would "definitely" recommend it to others, and 11% said they would "definitely not" do so. Poor standard of service was the common criticism cited.



The Rex monopoly

The overall satisfaction ratings are average for Regional Express (Rex), a local airline that flies travellers from cities to regional areas, such as Sydney to Dubbo and Melbourne to Mount Gambier. The airline took top ranking in our 2007 survey with an overall satisfaction score of 79%, and although it slipped to second place this time around, the 104 passengers (or 2% of survey respondents) who use the airline still rate it well. However, many feel the airline does not represent great value for money.

Weathering the storm

Since our last survey, Virgin Blue has maintained a high satisfaction rating in almost all areas. Qantas, on the other hand, has lost ground with passengers on most fronts, from its service standards to its safety record. Jetstar still falls short of the average for in-flight service, and while Tiger stands out for its value for money, it is lacking in other areas.

It will be a juggling act for airlines to maintain the service standards and value for money consumers expect at the same time as passenger volumes tumble. And they need to do this in the current economic climate, which sees them posting million-dollar losses while having to slash prices.

The first victim was Virgin Blue. After it announced in February it could be cutting 400 positions, making executive pay cuts and grounding five jets to cope with a drop in travel and a fare war with Jetstar, Rex further undermined VB's position by suggesting the budget airline was vulnerable to a takeover.

Our survey confirms intrepid Australians are making the most of the competitive domestic carrier market, with value for money and frequent flyer incentives the primary drawcards. Airline satisfaction, however, now means low cost as well as good service for consumers.

See the results of our international airline survey in the next issue of *CHOICE*, May 2009. ■

71% The number of respondents who booked their domestic flight over the internet.

WHAT MEMBERS SAY ABOUT DOMESTIC AIRLINES

Our survey included an open response section where subscribers could air praise and/or grievances about specific airlines. These are some of the highlights – and low points – for each carrier.

QANTAS

✗ "Good old Qantas – record-holders for late running and cancellations. I travel often – two to three return flights per month – and the perception is that they are getting worse. Their phony apologies really grate with me."

George, NSW

✓ "I have flown with Jetstar, Virgin and Qantas a number of times in the past three years. My preference is to always fly with Qantas as the level of service is superior. Being a frequent flyer you have access to Qantas Club, express baggage and valet parking, which the other airlines do not offer."

Penni, Qld

✗ "I'm concerned about Qantas management's attitude towards investing in maintenance and airline safety. The evidence suggests that Qantas' stringent safety standards have been relaxed. Once I spend my frequent flyer points or lose my Gold status I'll seriously consider flying other airlines."

Matthew, SA

JETSTAR

✗ "When I last flew with Jetstar, the seat I had to occupy had not been cleaned and had some unidentifiable stains on the seat which I had to avoid sitting on. Not nice."

Gerald, Vic

✓ "I've flown Jetstar twice in the last two years. It offers good value. It could best be described as a functional, no-frills airline, which suits me fine for the relatively short-haul flights I make."

Grant, Qld

VIRGIN BLUE

✓ "A Virgin flight attendant held a trivia quiz and most passengers took part. After announcing the winner and presenting a prize he finished off with a few jokes. It was the best flight we have had."

Leo, Vic

✓ "Always made to feel special – as though you're the only one on the flight. Staff are friendly and fun-loving, with a sense of humour, but professional in their job."

Bernadette, Qld

✗ "Virgin aircrew tend to joke around. On one flight, a member of the aircrew pretended she had her mother on the phone who had called her at work, and all the while she was broadcasting this over the intercom. It is one thing for crew to be friendly but another for them to be childish and not funny."

Michael, Vic

TIGER AIRWAYS

✓ "Tiger offers excellent value. We bought three return flights from Melbourne to the Gold Coast for a total of \$300. The flights left on time and in-flight service was more than you would expect of a budget airline."

Neil, Vic



✗ "The 'no-frills' airlines, such as Tiger, are just that. For tall or overweight people, seat comfort is marginal. Particularly for tall people, a flight of two hours can be indescribably uncomfortable. The staff on these flights appear to be under pressure, so service is marginal."

Dan, Vic

! "We booked five seats on Tiger. We arrived at the counter one hour before the flight and were ticketed. They had booked our two toddlers and eight-year-old in seats next to complete strangers. The ground staff said it was our fault for not arriving more than an hour before a flight. The pilot (thankfully) refused to take off until we were seated together."

Steve, Qld

REX

✓ "The Rex staff are incredibly friendly, know my favourite seat, and offer a glass of wine on the way home!"

Alan, Qld

✗ "I have always had the feeling that 'you can take it or leave it' because we live in the country, and we have no other choice."

Kenneth, NSW

HOW WE SURVEY

In November 2008, CHOICE invited 25,000 online and 16,358 magazine subscribers to take part in an online survey on domestic and international airlines – 4625 surveys were completed within the one-month deadline. To participate in the survey, respondents must have travelled by plane in the previous three years. Of the total surveys received, 4307 respondents reported flying domestically within the past three years.

We wanted to find out:

- overall consumer satisfaction with domestic airlines for economy flights.
- which domestic airlines respondents used the most and why
- how the airlines fared in specific attributes compared with our last survey in 2007.

Not quite like mother made

Many supermarket cakes are packed with additives, including artificial colours linked to hyperactivity in children. We tell you which brands to avoid.



nutshell

► Some supermarket cakes contain more than 20 additives. These can be used by manufacturers to disguise poor quality ingredients.

► While most additives in cakes appear to be safe, health concerns have been raised about some.

Make a cake at home and you're unlikely to use more than about six ingredients – butter, eggs, sugar, flour, milk and maybe chocolate, coconut or some fruit. But if you look at the ingredients listed on a cake from the supermarket you might find 40 or more, many of them chemicals you certainly wouldn't use at home. Worse, they're likely to include artificial colours that recent research suggests could be linked to hyperactivity in children.

What's in supermarket cakes?

We bought as many different cakes as we could find in Coles and Woolworths stores in Sydney – 97 cakes in total. We then checked the labels and found plenty of ingredients that wouldn't go into a cake you made yourself, such as egg powder, milk solids, potato or tapioca starch, palm oil, maltodextrin and dextrose. Some of the cakes contained whole eggs and even a little real butter, but nearly all of them included additives identified by numbers. While a small number of additives in the diet isn't a problem for most people – and we couldn't enjoy the convenience of processed foods without them – health and safety concerns have been raised with some of them. Furthermore, additives enable manufacturers to use cheaper ingredients, such as palm oil instead of butter and apple instead of raspberries in jam filling.

How many additives?

Using information on the labels, we estimated the number of additives you wouldn't use to make a cake at home. We didn't count "raising agents", as you'd probably use these in home baking in the form of baking powder or self-raising flour (see ABC of Additives, right). Only one cake, Cottage Cakes Banana Cake, contained no additives other than baking powder. But Woolworths Bakehouse Sponge Iced and Fresh Cream Filled topped our list with 27

additives, while Top Taste Rollettes Choc and Woolworths Bakehouse Sponge Single Birthday Fresh Cream both came a close second with 26. The table (page 18) gives the average number of additives for each brand (there were too many cakes to list them all).

✓ **Fewest additives** The following eight brands average fewer than 10 additives – and these are also the brands that don't use food colours linked to hyperactivity in children (see Running Riot, page 19).

- Cottage Cakes
- Dan Cake
- Liwell
- Cake Mark
- Big Sister
- Weight Watchers
- Whittings
- Mr Kipling

Some of the small brands might be hard to find, but Dan Cake, Big Sister, Mr Kipling and Weight Watchers are available in most supermarkets.

✗ **Most additives** Top Taste and Country Delight take the wooden spoon for more additives than other brands – with the big supermarkets' own brands not far behind (see table, page 18).

Top Taste and Country Delight both told us that additives prolong the life of their products. But this explanation doesn't really stack up (see Should Cake be a Consumer Durable?, page 18). Some additives certainly give the convenience of a longer-lasting product, less likely to go mouldy or grow hazardous microbes that could make you sick, but others, most notably food colours (see Colours of the Rainbow, page 18), appear to be included to enable manufacturers to use cheaper ingredients. And it's not just in the cheaper cakes where you find a large number of additives; some of the more expensive brands were among the heaviest users of additives. >

ABC of additives

Additives enable cake makers to use cheaper ingredients, such as palm oil instead of butter.

If we always bought fresh foods there would be no need for additives. But we don't often have that opportunity and additives are the price we pay for the convenience of manufactured foods. The national regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), has approved more than 300 food additives for use in Australia. FSANZ (and the food manufacturing industry) maintains these additives are

safe and that there are good reasons for their use, such as to prevent food poisoning or extend a food's storage life. But questions are being raised about the safety of some additives, and any use of artificial colours that raises safety concerns is hard to justify. Food labels often list additives by the purpose for which they're added to the food. We've listed below those you're most likely to find in cakes.

Antioxidants ▶

These are added to prevent oxidation of fat, which gives cake an unpleasant rancid, cardboard-like flavour. Fifty-two percent of the cakes contained tocopherols (306, 307), one form of which, α -tocopherol (307), is better known as vitamin E.

But another antioxidant in 19% of the cakes is butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA, 320). While some studies show this additive to be safe, others suggest it may cause cancer.

Emulsifiers ▶

Emulsifiers help to disperse fats and oils with water, and prevent them from separating again over time. The egg yolk does this for you when you make cakes at home. Most factory cakes contain fatty acid esters of glycerol (471) or polyglycerol (475) which are cheaper. They seem to have no adverse effects.

Gums ▶

These are used for thickening or forming gels; they're mostly used in cake fillings. The ones most often used are guar (412, extracted from the seeds of the guar plant that grows in India and Pakistan), xanthan gum (415, produced by the bacteria *Xanthomonas campestris*) and chemically modified starch (1422). They're all believed to be harmless – but if you are vegetarian you might want to check labels carefully because about a quarter of the cakes contain gelatine, a protein extracted from animal hides and bones.

◀ Humectants

These are added to prevent the cake from drying out. The chemicals used are either sorbitol or glycerol (sometimes both). They seem to have no adverse effects.

◀ Preservatives

They're added to help stop food from going mouldy and to prevent the growth of bacteria. Most of the cakes (87%) contained sorbic acid or potassium sorbate (200, 202). Sorbic acid is made artificially but occurs naturally in some plants and is believed to be safe. The second most frequently used preservative (in 27% of the cakes) is sulphur dioxide (220), which can also be added in the form of sodium metabisulphite (223). While sulphur dioxide at the very low levels used in food is safe for most people, it destroys vitamin B1 (thiamine) and can trigger asthma attacks.

◀ Raising agents

These produce small bubbles of carbon dioxide that give the cake a soft and fluffy texture. The chemicals most often used are sodium bicarbonate (500) with sodium pyrophosphate (450), which combine to produce carbon dioxide when water is added to the cake mix. These are the same chemicals you'd use at home – they're in baking powder and self raising flour.



If some companies have developed better packaging to reduce their dependence on additives, why can't they all?

< Colours of the rainbow in your cake

More than 80% of the cakes we bought contain artificial colours – Woolworths Bakehouse's "Sponge Single Birthday Fresh Cream" and "Sponge Iced and Fresh Cream Filled" contain no fewer than 11 different colours.

Food colours serve no purpose other than to improve the cake's appearance. And, even more than other additives, they enable manufacturers to get away with using cheaper ingredients. We found plenty of cakes filled with "jam" made from apples (one of the cheaper fruits) coloured red to resemble raspberries (much more expensive fruit). The jam in Top Taste Sponge Roll Raspberry Jam contains only 11% raspberries; the rest of the fruit is apple coloured red with carmoisine (122). And Woolworths Bakehouse Cherry Buttercake is made with "cherries" that contain some cherry, but also sugar, preservative (sodium benzoate), cherry flavour and the dye allura red (129).

Should cake be a consumer durable?

You expect fruit cake to last a long time, but we found other types of cake with impressively long shelf lives. On the day of purchase a Dan Cake Marble cake (a Madeira cake) still had 237 days to go before its best before date, and Livwell Double Chocolate Cake Bars still had 132 days to go. Despite this, these cakes contained relatively few additives.

The Livwell cakes are packed in a modified atmosphere, which protects them from oxidation and mould; the Dan Cake product contains alcohol, a natural preservative, and also has foil packaging which helps prevent mould. If some manufacturers can use better packaging to reduce their dependence on additives, why can't they all? ■

\$312 million The annual amount spent in Australia on cakes from supermarkets. With an average price of \$4.60 each, this amounts to about 70 million cakes.

SUPERMARKET CAKE ADDITIVES

Brand (ranked by number of additives)	Brand averages			
	Number of additives	Number of artificial colours	Number of artificial colours linked to hyperactivity	Price per kg (\$)
Cottage Cakes	0	0	0	13.00
Dan Cake	5	0	0	13.50
Livwell	5	0	0	9.00
Big Sister	6	0	0	8.00
Cake Mark	6	0	0	33.50
Weight Watchers	7	1	0	38.50
Mr Kipling	8	2	0	7.50
Whittings	8	1	0	12.50
Delish	10	3	2	12.50
Coles Smart Buy	11	2	1	5.00
Mills & Wares	11	2	1	10.00
Home Brand	12	2	1	5.00
Woolworths	12	3	2	9.50
Woolworths Bakehouse	12	3	1	15.00
Coles Bakery	13	3	2	12.50
Top Taste	14	3	1	12.50
You'll Love Coles	14	3	1	10.50
Country Delight	17	7	3	13.00

USING THE TABLE

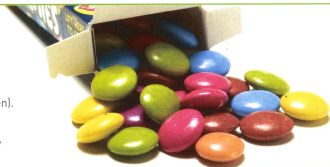
Number of additives Using the ingredients list on the labels, we counted the number of additives but excluded raising agents which are also used in home baking.

Number of artificial colours linked with hyperactivity This is the number of artificial colours used from the six that recent research has identified to be linked with hyperactivity in children (as listed in Running Riot, opposite).

Price Based on prices we paid in Sydney in December 2008. Sizes vary, so for ease of comparison we have calculated the price per kilogram and rounded to the nearest 50 cents.

Did you know?

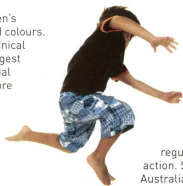
Right direction If you eat Smarties you may have noticed some slight changes in some of the colours. The manufacturer, Nestlé, has stopped using the artificial colours linked with hyperactivity and replaced them with plant-based alternatives such as turmeric (yellow), carotene (orange) and spirulina (green). And cake shop chain Michel's Patisserie told us they're developing new recipes for their cakes which reduce, and in some cases totally eliminate, the use of artificial colours.



RUNNING RIOT

There's growing evidence that some children's behaviour can be adversely affected by food colours. In 2004, an overview of 15 well-designed clinical trials concluded their "results strongly suggest an association between ingestion of [artificial food colourings] and hyperactivity". And more recently, in 2007, a carefully designed UK study published in the medical journal *The Lancet* found increased hyperactivity in some children given drinks containing artificial colours and the preservative sodium benzoate [211]. These colours were:

- tartrazine [102]
- quinoline yellow [104]
- sunset yellow [110]
- carmoisine [122]
- ponceau 4R [124]
- allura red [129]



Many Australian parents would prefer that they just weren't there. And with regulators in the UK and Europe acting swiftly to remove these colours from the food supply, or at least alert parents when they are present, CHOICE sees no reason why our national regulator shouldn't take similar action. So far, though, Food Standards Australia New Zealand has limited its response to suggesting parents use label information to identify when the additives included in the UK study are in their children's diet. Unfortunately it's not that easy. Ingredients can be listed in small print and with poor contrast. It requires persistence and good eyesight to pick out the critical numbers in a long list of ingredients – certainly not an easy task when you're shopping with small children.



CHOICE found at least one of these colours listed on more than half of the cakes we bought, and 10% had more than three of them. In the UK, the government's Food Standards Agency has proposed voluntary action by food manufacturers to stop using these colours by the end of this year, and next year any foods sold in the European Union that still contain these colours will be required to display a warning on the label saying "Consumption may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children".

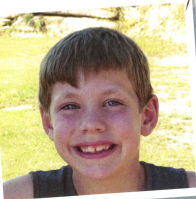


Identifying harmful food colours requires persistence and good eyesight – certainly not an easy task when shopping with small children.

IMAGES ISTOCKPHOTO

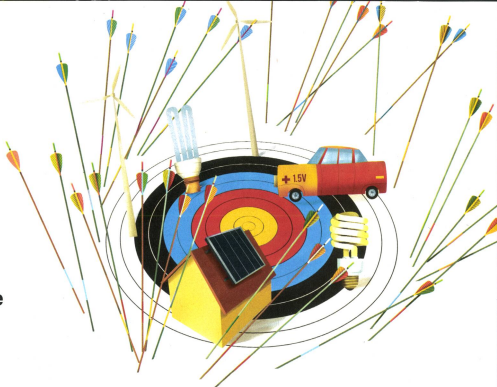
Fewer additives, better in class

Emma and Ian's son Timothy, aged seven, was struggling at school. A very active little boy, he found it difficult to sit still long enough to focus on his lessons – and often his teacher had to keep him back at lunch time to complete his work. Emma and Ian took Timothy to a paediatrician who specialises in behavioural issues. He recommended a three-month elimination diet, initially taking out all foods containing preservatives, colours, artificial flavours and also fruit and vegetables high in salicylates. Timothy's teacher reported an immediate improvement. He was completing his work, his reading improved dramatically and he was generally more settled.



Off target

If a new bill becomes law, nearly a million households could be paying for renewable energy that does nothing to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.



nutshell

► The voluntary purchase of government-accredited GreenPower or carbon offsets by consumers helps Australia meet its targets under the Kyoto Protocol, but can't help us exceed those targets.

► Unless changes are made, from 2010, voluntary actions to reduce emissions will make it easier and cheaper for big industry to pollute more.

When CHOICE members Cath and Wally signed up for GreenPower in 2007, they wanted to make a difference to the environment. They knew government-accredited renewable energy would cost extra, but were prepared to pay a premium on their monthly electricity bill to help lower Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

Elsewhere, Anthony and Louise's motivation for installing solar panels on their roof to generate electricity was also environmental, not economic. The system cost more than \$26,000, even after substantial federal rebates.

Now both households are among the hundreds of thousands paying extra for renewable energy that helps Australia achieve its carbon emission reduction targets. The catch is, a major flaw in government policy means their contributions are doing little to reduce Australia's carbon footprint. At worst, they are helping to prop up polluting industries. If the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) goes ahead, the scenario looks even more grim. The CPRS could result in many of our individual efforts to reduce emissions enabling big industry to pollute more, with overall emissions staying the same as they would without our efforts.

Consumers subsidising big polluters

When Australia signed the Kyoto Protocol in late 2007, a new mandatory target was set to restrict our national emissions to 108% of their 1990 levels. But since the beginning of 2008, almost all voluntary actions that households take to reduce emissions are counted towards that mandatory target. So if you pay for renewable energy to offset your household's annual electricity use, the resulting emission reductions are counted by the government towards the national target. Similarly, if you buy Australian carbon offsets, the emissions saved by those actions count towards the legally binding targets.

From bad to worse

This problem will soon be exacerbated by the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation, details of which were released in March 2009. The CPRS is the primary mechanism to achieve the mandatory Kyoto emission reductions and other long-term targets beyond 2012.

The government will give away and auction emissions "permits" that restrict large businesses' pollution to certain levels. Under the scheme, Australia will commit to a medium-term national emissions-reduction target of 5% below 2000 levels by 2020 (15% if an international agreement comes into place), and a long-term target of 60% emissions reduction below 2000 levels by 2050. The government has also reaffirmed its commitment to 20% of our energy being produced from renewable sources by 2020.

While there's still some hope of a reprieve (see Window of Opportunity, opposite), consensus is growing that after the CPRS is introduced, most voluntary actions, including buying GreenPower, installing solar panels or using less electricity, won't result in additional emissions reductions beyond the binding targets. In other words, consumers are disempowered – our direct actions to reduce greenhouse pollution are ineffective.

Did you know?

"Additionality" means "the demonstrable ability to reduce emissions beyond what would otherwise have occurred". It is considered by the federal government and just about everyone else to be one of the most important attributes of voluntary actions, such as carbon offsets. "Mandatory" emissions reductions must happen; "voluntary" actions should reduce emissions beyond that mandatory amount.

CHOICE believes consumers shouldn't have to pay more to pollute less so that major emitters can pay less to pollute more.

"Nothing households do to reduce their use of fossil fuels will reduce Australia's emissions by one kilogram," says Richard Denniss of the Australia Institute think tank. "Under this scheme any emission reductions achieved by Australian households will actually allow the big polluters to increase their emissions by an equivalent amount."

"The signing of the Kyoto Protocol and announcement of the CPRS has rendered all voluntary action since the beginning of 2008 ineffective and non-additional to the mandated targets," the Carbon Reduction Institute wrote in a submission prior to the CPRS white paper. Even the Department of Climate Change confirmed that while buying GreenPower increases the amount of energy produced from renewable sources, it will not change total greenhouse gas emissions from sources that are covered and capped by the CPRS.

GreenPower scheme at a crossroads

GreenPower is the national accreditation scheme for renewable energy, managed by the NSW Department of Water and Energy. As previous CHOICE reports explained, it increases the amount of renewable energy generated in Australia. But as it no longer helps to create additional greenhouse gas abatement, the scheme may have to change in order to retain and grow its 878,000 household customers and find new ones. The following three options are being considered.

- **Do nothing** Buying GreenPower won't achieve additional greenhouse reductions but remains a way for consumers and businesses to support the renewable energy industry.

- **Change the scheme** so GreenPower sales result in a CPRS permit being retired (see How the Permits Work, Against Consumers, below). Australia's greenhouse emissions would be reduced and "additionality" would be achieved. The domestic renewable energy industry would also be supported. The likely price for such a package is unknown – it could be much higher than the current price for GreenPower alone.
- **Package GreenPower** with a carbon offset or renewable energy credit from a developing country that doesn't have emissions limits under the Kyoto Protocol. This would also achieve additionality, however, money would flow out of Australia to other economies, businesses and overseas renewable energy industries.

Window of opportunity

The CPRS hasn't been through parliament and won't come into force until 2010, so there's still hope that the problems around voluntary actions can be fixed. The Total Environment Centre (TEC) says that for now, consumers who want to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions should continue as before, but also lobby for change. It accepts that as things stand, buying GreenPower won't reduce Australia's emissions, but notes that your money would still support the renewable energy industry and can reduce the emissions for which you're personally responsible. >



HOW THE PERMITS WORK AGAINST CONSUMERS

Under the CPRS, the federal government will issue and sell a limited number of pollution permits to the 1000 greatest polluters in Australia, covering 75% of national greenhouse emissions. The permits will restrict the companies' pollution to a set level that enables Australia to meet its emissions reductions targets. The CPRS places a price on every unit of carbon emission for big polluters, making cleaner options more attractive.

The CPRS is an important first step in putting a price on greenhouse pollution. However, there are serious flaws in the design of the system. By setting a "cap" on how much industry can pollute, it also creates set limits on emissions reductions, making it unlikely that Australia will go beyond its targets.

A simplified example illustrates this point: say 1000 government permits were given away and sold to industry, each allowing one tonne of greenhouse pollution. The resulting emission levels would be exactly 1000 tonnes. If a company reduced its pollution, it could sell permits it doesn't need to another company, allowing that company to pollute more.

Emission levels are the same; all that changes is the polluter and the price.

An example from The Australia Institute's report *Fixing the Floor on the Emissions Trading Scheme* illustrates the detriment to consumers of this scenario. "After emissions trading is introduced, a number of concerned households decide to install solar hot water systems to reduce their climate impact. Demand for electricity falls as a result and electricity companies end up purchasing fewer permits to cover their emissions. Reduced demand causes the price of permits to fall, enabling other large polluters to purchase additional permits at a lower than expected price." A lower permit price would also reduce industry's incentive to find alternative solutions.

The only way consumers could reduce industry's emission levels would be to buy permits and "rip them up", taking them out of circulation. The Department of Climate Change has indicated that households will be able to buy and voluntarily surrender CPRS permits to reduce Australia's emissions beyond the government's current 5% commitment.

CHOICE
wants all
voluntary
action
taken by
consumers
to be
counted as
additional
to the
mandatory
emissions
reductions,
so their
efforts can
make a real
difference.

< "We think that consumers should still do everything they can to reduce their own emissions, including taking energy efficiency measures, buying GreenPower and buying credible carbon offsets," says Jane Castle, Senior Campaigner with the TEC. "But they should also be calling on Prime Minister Rudd, and ministers Wong and Garrett, to ensure these efforts are additional to the weak emissions reduction target. Importantly, there is still a window of opportunity to achieve this change. TEC and the green industry sectors are campaigning on it at least up to when the Emissions Trading Scheme (CPRS) starts in 2010."

The Energy Retailers Association of Australia (ERAA), which represents companies selling energy (including renewable), is also lobbying the federal government to make GreenPower additional. It says the door isn't closed to ensuring extra environmental efforts by consumers and businesses will count. The ERAA's Executive Director Cameron O'Reilly says that "878,000 households have signed up to GreenPower in good faith and to make a difference. GreenPower was developed with government support and now it's at risk of becoming obsolete."



CHOICE SWITCH

Compare electricity prices, including GreenPower, at www.choiceswitch.com.au.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does GreenPower reduce greenhouse gas emissions?** Buying GreenPower supports the renewable energy industry, but the NSW Department of Water and Energy, which manages the scheme, recently confirmed GreenPower no longer leads to additional greenhouse gas reductions. If you don't buy GreenPower, the equivalent emission reductions would have to be paid for by someone else anyway.
- **If I discontinue my subscription to GreenPower, what are the repercussions?** While some people argue that buying GreenPower reduces the greenhouse pollution you're individually responsible for, discontinuing your payment results in no net difference to Australia's – or the world's – greenhouse gas emissions. However, cancelling support for GreenPower would negatively impact on the Australian renewable energy industry. This is unfortunate, as the industry is trying to create a cleaner environment and GreenPower purchases support the development of new greener technologies. The industry's efforts are being stifled by the federal government's policies – we will be reporting on the renewable energy industry in the coming months.
- **After the CPRS starts, will turning off my air conditioner and plasma TV reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions?** No, but it will save you money.
- **After CPRS, will blasting my air conditioner all day with the windows open increase Australia's greenhouse gas emissions?** No, but you'll have very high electricity bills. And you may find it hard to get rid of these bad habits if and when Australia's climate change policy changes to require deeper emissions cuts.

Similarly, the Clean Energy Council also wants to see consumers' efforts recognised – particularly those who have spent thousands on solar panel systems. "These people wanted to make a difference and made a significant personal and financial commitment to reducing emissions," says Matthew Warren, the council's chief executive. "That commitment should be honoured."

Where do consumers go from here?

So what next for the consumers we met at the start of this story, and the hundreds of thousands more paying for emissions reductions that will make no net difference? If the proposed legislation is passed in its present form, Cath and Wally have the option to stop paying the extra premium for GreenPower. The Department of Climate Change has indicated solutions that offer environmental outcomes above what would have otherwise occurred, such as CPRS permits and credible carbon offsets, will become available to consumers. It is developing a standard for voluntary carbon offsets.

The situation isn't so clear cut for Anthony and Louise, who invested \$26,000 in a solar photovoltaic system. They'd probably like to see the government ensure that the effort and expense they went to has been worthwhile. They didn't spend all that money so that industry could increase its greenhouse gas emissions and pollute more freely at a lower cost. ■



CHOICE verdict

CHOICE wants voluntary actions by consumers to be counted as additional to the mandatory emissions reductions, so such efforts make a real difference. Otherwise, supporting initiatives such as GreenPower, energy conservation and energy efficient products, as well as the installation of solar panels and solar hot water systems and using other alternative energy sources won't make additional greenhouse gas reductions. Voluntary actions by households should result in permits to pollute being taken out of circulation.

You can help by lobbying the government to change before it's too late, both to ensure that voluntary actions by individuals are additional to what Australia has to achieve under mandatory targets, and join the call for stronger emissions reduction targets in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scientific advice. Go to www.choice.com.au/green.



Just not the ticket

Not all ticketing agencies are created equal – or charge equally. CHOICE finds out why and exposes the hidden costs to watch for.

nutshell

► The full price of tickets is not transparent to consumers until add-ons such as handling fees and print-at-home charges are revealed before check-out.

► Consumers have almost no choice in ticket prices when the marketplace is dominated by agencies with exclusive ticketing rights to venues.

You wanted tickets to Shore Thing – the annual New Year's Eve dance music event held at Bondi Beach – and found tickets going for two different prices. If you bought the ticket from Moshtix, one of the smaller national ticketing agencies, you would have paid \$129 per ticket and an additional \$5.60 in booking fees. But if you got a ticket from Ticketek, you would have paid \$139 for the ticket and another \$8.50 to pick it up – a difference of \$12.90. The event is held at the same venue and there is no seating preference, so why the difference?

As CHOICE found out, add-on charges for tickets vary from event to event. These costs, such as phone booking charges and venue pick-up fees, are not upfront and you'll only discover how much extra you have to fork out when you've almost completed the booking and are about to pay up, so you're never sure if you have to pay the additional charges or how much. Furthermore, the "best available" seats you choose or have been assigned may exclude

seats – usually with the best view – that have already been privately allocated by the event promoter as complimentary tickets to corporate sponsors.

We explain how ticketing agencies dominate the market and what hidden costs you should watch out for.

Ticket scoop

In 2007, Australians spent \$1.23 billion on close to 19 million tickets for live performances (excluding sporting events), up from \$1.16 billion on 18 million tickets in 2006. This huge industry is dominated by Ticketek and Ticketmaster, the two major ticketing agencies operating in almost all states. Despite the existence of regional agencies, such as BASS in South Australia, BOCS in Western Australia, Qtix in Queensland and Canberra Ticketing, Ticketek and Ticketmaster have carved up major portions of the ticketing market in exclusive contracts with major venues. >



HELTER-SCALPER

The reselling of tickets above their face value, known as "scalping", generally drives up the prices of tickets. Scalping is illegal at major sports venues in Queensland and Victoria but not illegal in NSW, as the government believes event organisers should be responsible for stopping scalping. Most ticketing agencies specify that scalping via auction sites is a breach of sales conditions. To prevent scalping, the purchase of 10 tickets or more is typically handled by a ticketing agent's group booking sales team. The agencies can also cancel the tickets and blacklist the credit cards used to buy tickets suspected of being scalped.

In 2007, when Creative Festival Entertainment (CFE), promoter of the Big Day Out, tried to stop tickets from being snapped up by scalpers, eBay took it to court. CFE had printed warnings on the tickets that any resold for profit would be cancelled. The court found this was deceptive and misleading, as the company couldn't possibly track down all the tickets that had been resold for profit.

Generally, if you sell your tickets via an online auction site such as eBay because you cannot attend the event, it is not considered scalping – provided the selling price is not more than the face value of the ticket.

To gain exclusive ticketing rights to a venue, companies pay venue owners 'key money', which they recoup through high ticket profit margins.

Worst seat in the house

In December 2008, Bill Mulford bought four tickets at \$50 each for the Commonwealth Bank Series Australia v South Africa cricket match at Bellerive Oval in Hobart. He said no seating plan was available on either the Ticketmaster or Tasmanian Cricket Association (TCA) websites for checking the allocated seats.

"As such, I accepted Ticketmaster's statement that these were the best seats available," says Mulford. "Imagine my surprise and great disappointment to find that at least two of the allocated seats were directly behind a large roof-supporting pole. Two of us had to spend the entire day having our appreciation and enjoyment of the game seriously marred by this obstruction."

He complained to Ticketmaster, who referred the matter to TCA. In the end, TCA refunded him \$36 in total for the two blocked seats.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL

TICKET EVOLUTION - LAST MINUTE TICKETS

Consumers will soon be able to buy cheaper tickets through a new discount ticketing site [www.lastix.com.au], launching in June. MyTickets' last-minute service will allow event owners, promoters and sporting organisations to advertise unsold tickets on the website 14 days before the event date. During this time, consumers can buy tickets at reduced prices, access "two for one" type offers or buy a "last six combo" package where, for example, they watch cricket in the day and go to a Delta Goodrem concert in the evening.

On the day of performance, Lastix may also offer consumers tickets that did not sell out despite the oft-advertised "selling out fast" media hype. "With Lastix, consumers will access great last-minute ticket deals and hopefully get the chance to experience entertainment they might not normally see," says Christopher Plowman, Chief Executive of MyTickets.

The good news is that you can grab a really good bargain through Lastix. The downside is that if you really want to see a particular show or game, leaving it to the last minute risks not getting tickets at all.



< Ticketek is the exclusive ticketing agent for the Sydney Cricket Ground and Football Stadium, Princess Theatre in Melbourne and Adelaide Entertainment Centre. It also outbid Ticketmaster as the Melbourne Cricket Ground's exclusive ticketing agent for five years starting from March this year. Ticketmaster is the exclusive agent for the Telstra Dome in Melbourne, Sydney Entertainment Centre and AAMI Stadium in Adelaide.

To get exclusive ticketing rights, these companies have to pay the venue owners "key money", which they recoup through high ticket profit margins. The result is a duopoly that does little for competitive pricing. Consumers may score cheaper tickets when venue owners or event promoters don't have exclusive contracts with any ticketing agents and compete on pricing, but this is rare.

Event owners and producers may have a choice of venue, but they have no choice of ticket seller when the exclusive ticketing rights of the venue have been signed over to a particular ticketing agency.

What's in a ticket price?

While event producers set the cost price of tickets, including classes of seats and how many VIP seats to block out, ticketing agents determine the ticket add-ons, such as transaction or booking fees, print-at-home charges, postal costs and credit card fees. These add-ons are called "outside ticket" charges. There is also an "inside" ticket fee – paid to the ticketing agency by the event owner, producer or promoter – which is usually included in the advertised ticket price.

Add-on charges vary from one ticketing agency to another, as well as from event to event. West Australian ticketing agency, BOCs Ticketing, charges a one-off \$6.60 booking fee, regardless of the number of tickets you buy online or over the phone. The two larger ticketing agencies are not so generous. Ticketmaster can charge up to \$9.15 for online bookings, while Ticketek has a transaction charge of up to \$8.50 for phone bookings.

Paul Dainty, founder of Dainty Consolidated Entertainment, a promoter of major events such as the Rolling Stones, Neil Diamond and U2, says ticket add-ons by agencies are justified. "There's technology they have to keep up to date with and their capital reinvestment is pretty enormous. It's a good business when you've got a lot of inventory to sell, but when the business goes quiet, these companies have huge overheads to cover to provide their service."

Moshtix's managing director, Adam McArthur, disagrees. "By investing in technology, the overheads are lowered. Moshtix's operation remains profitable with high ticket volumes and low operational overheads."

Ticketmaster levies the transaction or handling fees as a lump sum after you have selected your tickets, while Ticketek's charges depend on how you want your tickets issued (see Who Charges What, below right).

BASS, a regional ticketing agency in SA run by the Adelaide Festival Centre, has a different pricing structure. For example, a \$99.50 general admission ticket to see Chris Isaak in "Barossa Under the Stars" includes the \$3.30 booking fee (regardless of how you booked) and \$4.70 commission, or inside ticket fee, BASS charges the event owner or producer.

No industry watchdog

In Australia, there is no regulatory body overseeing the setting of ticket prices or pricing structure of tickets. Live Performance Australia (LPA), peak body for the live entertainment and performing arts industry, says its members usually state in advertisements that "additional charges" apply to the advertised price, in a bid to be as transparent as possible about ticket costs.

LPA spokesperson Suzanne Daley Carr says while the LPA has not received any consumer complaints in recent years about add-on fees, it set up a new complaints handling and dispute resolution policy last September (complaints@liveperformance.com.au) to address consumer complaints when they are not resolved by an LPA member.

Seating access

When you book tickets online you'll have a rough idea of where you might be seated or standing, but generally you can't choose the location of your seat (see Worst Seat in the House, opposite). Most ticketing agencies sell tickets on a computer-generated "best available" seating system that excludes complimentary and sponsor tickets privately allocated by the event owners or producers. LPA's Ticket and Revenue Survey for 2006 and 2007 shows that 1.7 million free tickets were issued in 2006 and close to three million such tickets were given out in 2007. Then there are pre-sale tickets offered online – often at a premium – which may also decrease the chances of equal access to seating.

Last August, CHOICE subscriber Rosie Bright bought two silver-class tickets for \$165 each from Ticketek to see Bob Dylan at the Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne. "We assumed that silver class tickets were good but ended up getting tickets that were very close to the back and needed binoculars to see the band properly," she says.

Consumers have better access to seating in venues such as the Sydney Opera House, which runs its own box office and allows you to choose your seats for some performances. Cirque Du Soleil's website features a

graphical interface allowing you to select your seats from a map that shows exactly what seats are available for each show session. The Sydney Symphony, a resident performer and event owner at the Sydney Opera House, also runs its own box office.

Independent event websites, such as www.mytickets.com.au, help consumers compare and buy tickets by listing details and ticket information for all events. If two ticketing agencies are offering tickets to the same event, patrons are most likely to find the best price on this website. ■



WHO CHARGES WHAT

- **BASS (SA)** Booking fee is included in the advertised ticket price: \$3.30 per ticket (online, phone, mail or courier), regardless of the event.
- **BOCS (WA)** Booking fees: \$6.60 per transaction (regardless of number of tickets) online or through the phone; \$2.20 per ticket if the tickets are bought from an agency. For general admission tickets, an additional \$2 charge is levied for tickets to be sent via registered post.
- **Canberra Ticketing (ACT)** Booking fee: \$7.20 per transaction for bookings made online or by phone. Handling fee: \$1.10 for tickets to be mailed. No charge for venue pick-up.
- **Qtix (Qld)** Booking fee: \$1.50 to \$3 per ticket.
- **Moshtix (national)** Booking fees: the basic charge is up to \$3.50 for online bookings and \$5 for phone bookings. For bookings at Moshtix outlets, fees range between \$2.50 and \$4, with a \$1 retail fee on top. A 2.5% charge is included in the booking fee for credit card bookings.
- **Ticketmaster (national)** Booking fee: up to \$9.15 per transaction online or up to \$8.80 over the phone. Handling fees: no charge for printing your tickets at home or picking them up at the box office. A charge of up to \$4.50 applies for express mail and up to \$3.75 for registered mail.
- **Ticketek (national)** Booking fee included in the ticket price. Handling fees: up to \$8.50 per transaction for phone bookings. For online bookings, a charge of \$4.95 applies for printing your ticket or tickets at home, \$6.95 to pick them up at the box office or have them mailed to you and up to \$10.45 for registered post.

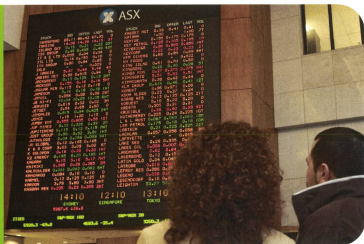
There is no regulatory body in Australia overseeing the setting of ticket prices or the pricing structure of tickets.

CHOICE verdict

Ticketing add-on charges are decided and controlled by ticketing agencies, and a lack of regulation means some agencies' charges are more punishing than others. CHOICE believes add-on fees should be upfront so consumers can see all the extra charges, and therefore total price of their ticket, before filling in personal details and providing payment details.

Share the wealth

The plunging share market is attracting savvy bargain hunters. CHOICE guides first-time investors through the options.



nutshell

- ▶ Managed funds and index funds enable investors to regularly drip-feed small amounts into shares.
- ▶ For those who want to buy shares directly, stockbrokers' fees and services vary.
- ▶ A company's past performance is not an indicator of future performance.

In the past 18 months Australian shares have followed world indices deep into the red, falling by over 50% (see graph below). It's been the second-worst crash in our share market's history, and a devastating time for investors, particularly those who've seen the value of their superannuation funds plummet. Despite the market hitting a five-year low, the worst may not be over, with further ups and downs likely in this volatile and uncertain economic environment.

Nevertheless, some industry commentators say such declines have left Australian shares looking relatively cheap, providing capital growth opportunities for long-term investors. Some are calling this a "two for one sale", pointing to the relatively low price of shares compared with company earnings, as well as dividend rates that far exceed the income you'd earn from a term deposit. They further point out that in the past, the Australian index has always rebounded from bear markets.

However, there's no certainty that the domestic share market will rise again – or by how much and how quickly

(they could continue to decline). It's also worth noting that none of the experts predicted the extent of the global financial crisis we're now experiencing.

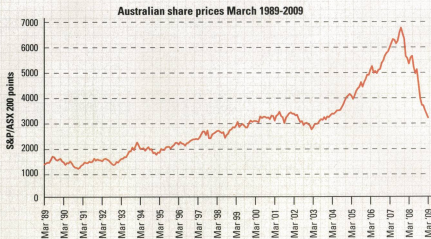
Should you decide to invest in shares, there are plenty of ways to benefit from a bounce-back, whether you have lots of money to invest at once or would like to "drip feed" small amounts into a share fund over time. CHOICE considers some of your options, including buying shares directly through a stockbroker, letting an expert do the hard work for you with a managed fund, and tracking the market with an index fund or exchange traded fund. If you decide to take the plunge and invest in shares, make sure you understand the risk of further market declines and continuing volatility, and consider getting licensed financial advice.

33%

of share investors use daily newspapers as their main source of information.

Source: Australian Securities & Investments Commission, April 2008.

The rise and fall of Australian shares



Source: Australian Stock Exchange data quoted at www.asx.com.au, except closing price for 2 March 2008, taken from www.asx.com.au

1 Buy shares directly

You'll need to go through a stockbroker to buy individual shares. If you don't need investment advice, the cheapest way is through an online broker. Their fees start at about \$15 per trade, up to \$50 for the more expensive providers – the table below shows some of the stockbrokers' products; they sometimes offer a range to suit different investors' needs. Check other fees, read brokers' Financial Services Guides and Product Disclosure Statements before choosing one. All the major banks have an online stockbroking arm whose websites provide a range of services to help you research shares and other investments, including daily market commentaries, their analysts' research, research from independent ratings agencies and company profiles.

For investors who want advice or to deal in large amounts of shares, a "full service" broker could be the way to go. They usually charge a commission of 2.5%-3% for share trades, with a minimum fee of \$100. Their recommendations are covered by the fee – and this must be provided in a written Statement of Advice. The percentage fees are reduced for very large trades (six figures), while the cost to buy international shares is higher.

You generally need plenty of money to make direct share purchasing work, otherwise broker fees could make it uneconomical. One of the basic principles of investing is to diversify to spread your risk; if you invest all your money in just one or a handful of companies' shares, you'll be seriously affected if any suffer a major price decline or collapse. Some of our top 200 listed companies have lost more than 95% of their value in the past 18 months.

The Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) says successful investors own shares in about eight to 14 different industries across the economy. According to the commission's website, "so long as you get a good spread across different industries, the investment literature suggests you don't need to own shares in 30 to 50 companies." >

Did you know?

The Australian index is worth just 2% of global share markets. You can buy shares from other countries through stockbrokers, managed funds, index funds and exchange traded funds. Broker fees for international trades are higher and it's not always possible through some online broker packages (see the table below for more).

Unless you have plenty of money to make direct share purchasing work, high broker fees could make it less than economical.

ONLINE STOCKBROKER FEES AND SERVICES

Broker (in alphabetical order)	Product name	Trade fee (<\$5000)	Trade fee (>\$10,000)	International shares	Analyst research	Independent research
Amscot Discount Stockbroking (A)	amscotOnline Value Rate	\$14.85	\$19.80		✓	✓
BankWest (A)	Bankwest Online Share Trading	\$27.00	\$27.00		✓	✓
Bell Direct	Bell Direct	\$15.00	\$15.00		✓	✓
CMC Markets Stockbroking	CMC Markets Stockbroking	\$19.95	\$19.95		✓	✓
CommSec	Internet Preferred Pricing – Website & Pro Trader 2	\$19.95	\$19.95	✓	✓	✓
E*Trade	E*TRADE Pro	\$32.95	\$32.95		✓	✓
Easy Street Financial Services (A)	EasyBroking	\$26.00	\$26.00			
Goldman Sachs JBWere	Goldman Sachs JBWere	\$50.00	0.75%		✓	✓
Interactive Brokers	Interactive Brokers	\$6.00	0.08%	✓		✓
Macquarie Bank	Macquarie DirectTrade	\$39.95	\$39.95			✓
Morrison Securities	webIRESS for Online Trading	\$22.00	\$22.00			
NAB Online Trading	NAB Online Trading – Professional	\$29.95	\$29.95		✓	✓
Netwealth (A)	Netwealth Share Trading	\$17.99	\$19.95		✓	✓
OneTrade Stockbroking (A)	OneTrade PRO	\$17.95	\$24.75			
St George Bank (A)	directshares	\$32.95	\$32.95	✓	✓	✓
Suncorp-Metway (A)	Suncorp Share Trade	\$23.95	\$23.95			
Westpac Broking	Westpac Broking Integrated Accounts	\$24.95	\$24.95		✓	✓

TABLE NOTES

(A) Not an ASX Market participant, but would trade through one. Participants are supervised by the ASX and covered by the National Guarantee Fund, which can compensate consumers in certain circumstances, such as if a stockbroker becomes insolvent. Details at www.asx.com.au.

The fall and fall of Japanese shares



SHARES DON'T ALWAYS RISE IN THE LONG TERM

There's no guarantee that Australian shares will recover to former glories or, if they do, how long it will take. While it's arguable Australian investors have been conditioned into thinking our share index will always go up in the long term, some other countries have had a very different experience. In Japan the share market has just hit its lowest point in 20 years and is now more than 80% below 1989 levels (as the chart shows). Not only has the Japanese index failed to recover from its crash in the early 1990s, when share values declined by 59% in just two-and-a-half years, it's actually gone lower again and hasn't shown any signs of recovery, with the economy in recession and predicted to continue shrinking in 2009. Japan serves as a warning to all those investors who believe share prices must always rise.

When choosing a managed fund you should research where your money will be invested, including the mix of assets, sectors and companies.

2 Managed funds If you don't have the time, expertise or money to build a share portfolio by buying directly, consider buying units in a professionally managed fund. Managed funds pool investors' money and do all the buying and selling of shares and other assets for you. Naturally, you pay fees for this fund management.

There are literally thousands of managed funds on the market, including sector-specific funds that invest in a particular asset or sector (such as Australian shares or international property) and multisector funds that spread investors' money around a mix of asset classes (cash deposits, fixed interest, shares and property). This diversified approach spreads your risk.

The table below shows how the median Australian share fund performed over the last one, three, five and seven years (after fees) compared to the overall share market during the same period. Research house Morningstar supplied the data, which shows there was virtually no difference between the average professionally managed fund and the share market itself.

AVERAGE MANAGED FUND PERFORMANCE TO 31 DECEMBER 2008

Index	One year (%)	Three years (% pa)	Five years (% pa)	Seven years (% pa)
Morningstar Australian Share Fund index	-38.08	-3.92	6.56	5.08
S&P/ASX 300 Accumulation index	-38.92	-4.03	6.72	5.49

Source: www.morningstar.com.au

The best managed funds outperformed the index, but predicting which managers will perform best is difficult.

When choosing a managed fund, consider the following factors.

- **Provider** Is it a well-known financial services company with a strong track record?
- **Excessive fees** have a negative effect on your investment returns, so don't pay too much. Annual management fees average 1.5%, which is deducted from your fund's balance each year. Other fees can also apply, including an entry fee of up to 5% of your contributions, but much less through a discount broker. If you invest through a financial planner, fees are negotiable (as most planners keep some of what you pay as their commission).
- **Research** where your money will be invested, including the mix of assets, sectors and companies.
- **Performance** While past returns don't indicate future returns, look for a fund that has performed consistently well against its peers and benchmarks over the medium and long term. Don't just go for last year's top fund, as it's unlikely that short-term gain will be repeated.
- **Amount** Plenty of funds let you get started with amounts as little as \$1000.
- **Study** the managed fund's Product Disclosure Statement. It should tell you most of what you need to know about the investment you're entering.

46% of the Australian population owned shares directly or indirectly (through their super fund) in 2006, while 38% owned shares directly.

Source: ASX, 2006 Australian Share Ownership Survey

AUSTRALIAN SHARE INDEX FUNDS PERFORMANCE TO 31 DECEMBER 2008

Index	Minimum investment (\$)	Minimum additional investment (\$)	Entry fee (%)	Ongoing annual fee (%)	Exit fee (%)	One year (%)	Three years (% pa)	Five years (% pa)	Seven years (% pa)	Ten years (% pa)
Vanguard Australian Share Index Fund	5000	100 / 1000 (A)	0.2	0.75 (B)	0.1	-38.79	-4.16	6.55	5.26	6.73
ANZ Online Investment Account	1000	100	0.25	1	0.25	na	na	na	na	na
S&P / ASX 300 Accumulation Index	na	na	na	na	na	-38.92	-4.03	6.72	5.49	6.93

Source: Fund managers

TABLE NOTES

(A) BPay - \$100;
cheque - \$1000.
(B) For less than
\$50,000; fees reduce
for larger amounts.
na Not applicable.
ANZ launched
this fund in
November 2008, so
performance figures
are not yet available.

3 Index funds

Index funds are among the cheapest way to invest in either the whole Australian share market or a portion of the index. These funds take the opposite approach to actively managed funds in which fund managers try to outperform their peers and chosen benchmarks. They attempt to track a safe benchmark: for example, the best-known index manager, Vanguard Investments, offers an Australian share index fund that aims to replicate, before fees, the performance of the S&P/ASX 300 Accumulation Index. Such index funds are "unlisted", because they're not quoted on the Australian stock exchange. Like managed funds (opposite), you buy units in an index investment from the fund manager, or through a financial adviser or broker.

The main advantage of index funds is their low fees, usually less than 1% per annum. On the downside, index funds won't outperform the market they track or their chosen benchmark. Share index funds will invest in both poor- and well-performing companies, and may be less diversified than managed funds that invest in a range of asset classes (cash, bonds, property and shares).

The table above shows two of the domestic index funds available to people with relatively small amounts to invest. International index funds covering sectors such as international shares, bonds, property and fixed interest are also available.

4 Exchange traded funds

Exchange traded funds (ETFs) are the cheapest way to track the performance of a particular share index. Essentially, unlike the unlisted investments in index funds, ETFs are index funds that are bought and sold like shares. Their main benefit is low fees, which start at just 0.29% for an Australian share fund. These listed funds also allow you to get instant diversification - with one trade you can become a part-owner in hundreds of companies. Like any other share, you'll need to go

through a stockbroker or online broker to buy ETFs, so consider broker costs in your decision.

Despite their low costs and accurate tracking of chosen share market indices, not many financial planners recommend investing in ETFs, perhaps because they're not authorised to do so, or ETFs don't pay them sales or advice commissions. Fee-for-service financial planners who aren't reliant on commissions may be more likely to recommend investing in ETFs.

The ETF market is rapidly growing around the world, and has expanded in Australia recently with the launch of iShares, which tracks the performance of 16 overseas share markets. Closer to home, SPDRs (which originally came from the US title "Standard & Poor's Depository Receipts") from State Streets Global Advisers give you the opportunity to track the local share market's overall performance (see Useful Websites, page 30). The table below profiles Australian share ETFs. >

EXCHANGE TRADED FUNDS PERFORMANCE TO 31 DECEMBER 2008

Index	Annual management fee (%)	One year (%)	Five years (% pa)
SPDR S&P / ASX 50 Fund	0.29	-35.76	6.84
Benchmark index: S&P / ASX 50	na	-35.79	7.17
SPDR S&P / ASX 200 Fund	0.29	-38.47	6.56
Benchmark index: S&P / ASX 200	na	-38.44	6.89

Source: State Streets Global Advisers

34%

of direct share investors have a portfolio with eight or more shares.

Source: ASX, 2006 Australian Share Ownership Survey

5 Superannuation

Chances are you're already exposed to shares through your super fund. Ninety percent of people are in their employer's default fund, which is where your money goes if you don't make an active choice. The default is often a "balanced" option that invests in a mix of assets, including cash and fixed interest, and 60%-75% in property and shares.

Some super funds enable you to trade individual shares that are listed on the Australian Stock Exchange (trading fees apply). If you go down this path, it's a good idea to make sure your super fund portfolio remains diversified between different companies, sectors and types of investments. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. ■

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

In mid-February 2009, CHOICE asked some industry participants for their views about the outlook for Australian shares. Most were optimistic about the medium- to long-term prospects for Australian shares, cautioning that in the short term, prices could fall further. None of these opinions, however, are financial advice.

- **Shane Oliver**, Chief Economist AMP: "Shares are now good value from a long-term perspective. There are bargains – shares with a high dividend yield and low price-to-earnings ratios. Dividend yields are attractive, at about 6.5% to 7% including franking credits, although I wouldn't be rushing into shares with everything you have right now, as it's too early to conclude the market has bottomed. It's a good time to start averaging into shares."
- **David Wright**, Director Zenith Partners, which researches managed funds and provides recommended lists to financial planners: "We anticipate more volatility in the share market and there is some risk that it could go lower. If and when there's a recovery it's likely to happen quickly, with much of the rebound happening in the first few months. It's very difficult to time the top and bottom of the market – I haven't seen any professional investor do it. The best risk management strategy for new investors is to buy shares regularly through averaging in" [see Jargon Buster, opposite].
- **Savanth Sebastian**, Economist CommSec: "Equity markets are weak and more falls could be on the way. However, price-to-earnings ratios are at their lowest level in 28 years and some companies are paying dividends of 8% to 10%. If you're looking to invest in shares, take a defensive strategy, accumulating blue chips in areas like healthcare, telecommunications and consumer staples. Blue chip companies with solid growth prospect should be considered."
- **Roger Montgomery**, Chairman Clime Capital, boutique fund manager: "The time to be interested in investing in shares is when nobody else is, and that seems to be now. The key to share investing is to find great quality businesses that will grow profits over the next five to 10 years, but not at the expense of investors' capital. Before investing, ask yourself if you have an understanding of how to value a business and assess its performance. If you don't, use an expert [managed fund] or learn. Look for fund managers that follow an approach that provides great three-, five- and 10-year performance. Don't just compare the overall percentage return during that time, but how it was achieved. Look for managers with a rational and commonsense approach."

USEFUL WEBSITES

- **Australian Securities & Investments Commission** www.fido.gov.au
- **Australian Securities Exchange** www.asx.com.au
- **Eureka Report** www.eureka-report.com.au
- **Exchange traded funds** www.spdrs.com.au and www.ishares.com.au
- **Managed funds research** www.morningstar.com.au and www.standardandpoors.com.au

Jargonbuster @!?

Blue chip shares While the term might convey a perception of safety or quality, blue chip really refers to the size of a publicly listed company. In fact, the original term came from the gambling world, as casinos' highest value chips are blue. There's no strict rule for what qualifies: one definition says companies need a market value of \$1 billion, but to put this in context, Australia's largest company, BHP, is worth about \$168.75 billion.

Averaging in Also known as "dollar cost averaging", is a strategy for buying shares by regularly investing. You might decide to put \$100 into a share fund on the first Monday of every month. As the price of shares rises and falls regularly, your \$100 will buy more shares when prices are weak and fewer shares when their prices are higher. Over the long run, the prices average out. This approach doesn't guarantee profits, but can smooth the ups and downs.

Share index A way to measure the value of a basket of shares. The S&P/ASX 200 index, for example, represents the market value of our 200 largest public companies. It's a "capitalisation-weighted" index, meaning that the size of a company determines what proportion of the index it represents. A change in BHP's share price, for example, would have a bigger effect on the index than the same percentage change in a smaller company's share price.

Points The value of most share market indices is measured in "points", which represent the value of all the companies with shares on the index – for example, in mid-March the S&P/ASX 200 was at about 3200 points.

Price-to-earnings ratio This is a share's price divided by the company's annual earnings per share. It's one of the key measures used to assess the attractiveness of a share's price for investors, although it's just one part of the puzzle.

Dividend yield A dividend is what's paid from company profits to shareholders. The dividend yield is the annual dividend divided by the company's share price, expressed as a percentage. You can choose to receive your dividends as a regular income (they're usually paid every six or 12 months), or use the dividends to buy more shares (known as a dividend reinvestment plan).



101 ways to your wallet

Advertising is no longer about a simple billboard or a catchy jingle. CHOICE reveals the latest tricks companies use to catch our attention and open our wallets.

▶ "What do you think about the cool Ducati..."

nutshell

▶ Consumers are increasingly immune to traditional advertising media such as television, radio and print.
▶ The latest advertising techniques are less intrusive and more subliminal.

You may be surprised to learn that in an average day – commuting to work, buying a coffee or lunch, shopping, exercising, dropping your kids off at school and so on – it's likely you'll have been exposed to as many as 5000 advertising messages. While this may sound like an alarming figure, most of us probably won't have even noticed, consciously at least. From outdoor billboards, radio commercials and TV ads to shopping dockets and even your coffee cup, advertising is everywhere.

With industry research revealing that up to 75% of new products launched on the market are destined to fail, the advertising industry has had to become more creative in the war for our attention. The weapons they use are as diverse as the products they're spruiking; from brain scans to chatty hairdressers, the industry has never been more innovative.

So just what are some of the latest techniques advertisers and marketers use to open our hearts, minds, and most importantly, wallets? CHOICE decided to find out.

Mission accomplished, advertisers win?

Product placement in films and television is nothing new – the Bond film *Die Another Day* was dubbed "Buy Another Day" for featuring 23 products in 123 minutes – but until recently the music industry could have been considered the final frontier for advertising and creative integration. While music is often used as the soundtrack in radio and TV advertisements, products are now being increasingly incorporated into the original music itself. >

BUY, BUY BABY

"Cute" and "cuddly" are not the kind of words traditionally associated with a car. Yet when a group of German designers decided to conduct research on various car brands they were in for a surprise. Using a range of classic car designs, including Ferrari and Mini Cooper, the company used fMRI technology (functional

Magnetic Resonance Imaging) to scan consumers' brains for activity as they viewed the images.

While sports cars such as Ferrari predictably stimulated a region

of the brain usually associated with reward and reinforcement, the compact Mini Cooper caused a far more unusual reaction: its design activated the same part of the brain that "lights up" when people look at a baby's face.

Martin Lindstrom, international brand consultant, believes the huge success of the Mini Cooper is due to its design, which makes it more than just a car in people's minds. "It's a gleaming little person, Bambi on four wheels. It makes you feel like you want to pinch its chubby metallic cheeks and then drive it away," he says.

Lindstrom says this kind of reaction is the ultimate goal of most brands. "Brand isn't rational, it's purely emotional and that's exactly what the industry would like to activate in our brains. If we have an emotional response to a brand we'll be prepared to pay a premium price for it."



One expert suggests younger people are now so used to everything being branded, it's viewed as a stamp of approval.

◀ Recently, chart-topping singer Fergie hosed down rumours that her next album was to be sponsored by a major clothing label and include product names in the lyrics. While her management has denied this partnership, other artists have been less shy; in 2007, as part of a brand partnership he had with American Express, hip-hop artist Kanye West cavorted with an animated red Amex card in his film clip *Good Life*.

Adam Kluger, Head of Brand Partnerships at the LA-based Kluger Agency, specialises in what he calls "brand dropping" in the music industry. Although declining to name the partnerships he currently manages, he believes music works more effectively than traditional forms of advertising, especially with younger audiences. "There is no other form of repetitive entertainment that is constantly being viewed as much as the music video," he says. "If the core demographic of a brand matches the target audience of the artist, not only do we have a successful advertising campaign, we now have a product on the fast track to being an iconic brand."

Adam Ferrier, consumer psychologist and planning partner for Australian agency Naked Communications, even suggests that younger people are now so used to everything being branded, it can be viewed as a stamp of approval. "If there's an event that is heavily branded with a whole lot of cool brands and logos compared with an event with none, they are likely to think, 'What's wrong with that second event? Why doesn't it have any brands associated with it?' Brands are no longer seen as an intruder but more a sign of endorsement."



Subliminal signs

When Channel Ten broadcast the ARIA Awards in 2007, eagle-eyed viewers noticed that between the various segments, logos from award sponsors flashed up on the screen for one to four frames, equating on average to a tiny 0.10 of a second. It was literally blink-and-miss-it advertising, but the following year the Australian Communications and Media Authority found that Ten had breached the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice by transmitting images that were below or near the threshold of normal awareness. Ten defended its position, arguing the rapid-cut graphics weren't meant to be subliminal but merely in keeping with the fast-paced look and feel of the presentation.

While this exercise resulted in a lot of media attention, industry experts contacted by CHOICE say that subliminal advertising in this form is nothing new. "It's been around since the 1950s," says Gayle Kerr, Senior Lecturer in Advertising at the Queensland University of Technology. "It's never really been proven to be effective and isn't common, though you have to wonder if the

Did you know?

Zero movement, zero success While it may seem that many of the tricks used on consumers are unfair, experts we spoke to were unanimous that consumers have never been better positioned to bite back if they don't like something – and advertisers who aren't quick to respond will get savaged.

In 2006, Coca-Cola anonymously launched a new product in Australia, Coke Zero, by setting up the "Zero Movement", which appeared to be a grassroots street campaign using chalk drawings, pamphlets and a blog of the same name – none of which directly linked back to Coke. While the campaign created buzz, it was for all the wrong reasons as consumers quickly discovered who was behind it and hit back with a blog of their own, attacking the brand and drawing negative media attention. Within weeks the original material on the blog was removed, with Coke admitting that the campaign "wasn't for everyone".

"The greatest benefit of technology has been that it empowers consumers to talk back," says QUT's Gayle Kerr.

THE ZERO COKE MOVEMENT

thezeromovement.org

purpose this time was simply to create some controversy – it got a lot of attention."

According to Martin Lindstrom, brand guru and author of the book *Buyology*, there are plenty of other subliminal techniques used to sell products, particularly in retail. Interestingly, one of the most common is smell. "Of all our senses, smell is the most primal," says Lindstrom. "I was at a store down at Bondi Beach the other day and they were spraying a coconut fragrance and immediately I found myself feeling relaxed and on holidays. It made me want to linger in there."

Lindstrom suggests that many smart marketers attach fragrance to the products they are selling. A UK clothing brand was once well-known for pumping its stores with the smell of freshly laundered cotton, while many supermarkets now locate their bakeries close to the entrance to attract shoppers. In Northern Europe, some supermarkets don't even bother with actual bakeries, instead pumping an artificial baked bread smell straight into the aisles.



Guerrillas in the market

The phrase "guerrilla marketing" was originally coined by business author Jay Conrad Levinson in 1984. He defined the technique as achieving conventional goals, such as profits and joy, with

unconventional methods, such as investing energy instead of money. These days, guerrilla marketing is commonplace as part of the marketing and advertising mix.

Monique Haylen is the founder of MINT PR, a Sydney agency that specialises in unconventional campaigns using techniques such as ambient media and "brand ambassadors". According to Haylen, "the challenge for us is how do we interrupt someone's normal life without being offensive so they can pay attention to a brand? Humour works, creativity works."

Adam Ferrier says humour and creativity can work well for the right market. "One of the most successful campaigns we did was for a streetwear brand where we played on the misconception that advertisers brainwashed people," he says. "We had events where we hypnotised people in public and pretended that they would become brand advocates for life. The media were totally outraged by it and the whole thing was a joke. This doubled the distribution of the brand, sales went up and we won an award at Cannes [advertising industry awards]."



Viruses and 'word of mouse'

Viral campaigns rely on word of mouth, or more commonly "word of mouse", working on the theory that if a customer likes something they will be more inclined to share it with their friends online. Ideally, the consumer is recruited involuntarily to spread the message through online interactive games, emails or videos.

One such success is Queensland Tourism's latest web campaign which reached 162 countries, attracted 34,000 applicants and gained broad international media coverage. Their "Best Job in the World" competition invites job seekers to apply via video for the chance to

live rent free on the Barrier Reef for six months. When the campaign launched, the host website crashed with the sheer amount of traffic on the site.

Other viral successes such as "Dancing Matt" – a video featuring a guy dancing in locations all over the globe – started off as a genuinely non-commercial activity but has since attracted high-paying sponsors, such as Visa, keen to catch a piece of the viral action.

Consumers bite back

While there's never been more competition to grab our attention, the news isn't all bad. With the advent of the internet, social networking sites and mobile phones, never before has the consumer had so much access to information and subsequently to advertisers.

According to Adam Ferrier, consumers have nothing to fear from the advertising industry. "I think that with digital technology, consumers are much more empowered. You can't just get away with a glossy ad with bright shiny teeth anymore. These days there is a lot more opportunity for consumers to get what they want, rather than what marketers think they want."

If you see an advertisement you think has crossed the line for whatever reason, the Advertising Standards Bureau accepts complaints for most forms of advertising. For more information head to www.adstandards.com.au. ■



CHOICE ONLINE

Who do you think you are? It seems consumer consultants have a million and one ways to slice and dice the Australian consumer to fit into their categories. Our quick quiz will reveal which category you fall: see www.choice.com.au/consumers

WHISPER CAMPAIGN

Have you ever sat captive in a salon chair while your hairdresser attempts to make talking an Olympic sport? While you chat about the latest TV shows, books or movies, you may not realise your hairdresser, shop assistant or even your personal trainer is actually part of that product's marketing mix.

Sydney-based MINT PR's Monique Haylen says she has thousands of "style influencers" on her books. "Whisper marketing is what we refer to as generating authentic word of mouth," she says. "When we started doing word of mouth it was originally about getting people to talk. We don't pay but we provide product to people we think it's appropriate for, or give them information and hope that if they like it they'll talk about it."

Haylen says determining who should spread the word depends on the client. "If it's Channel Seven with a preview of a new program, we would probably use hairdressers. They can talk about how they've seen an exclusive preview, word of mouth is about engaging people and having a dialogue."

Haylen also uses other techniques to build brand awareness by stealth. "We're currently promoting a brand of jewellery by placing it on the hands of bar staff in certain upmarket bars. We might choose style ambassadors such as newsreaders, magazine editors or stylists and give them product to wear. It's a cost-effective way of getting a message out about a brand and can work well with other kinds of marketing."



PHOTOS TAKEN AT PATRICK'S OF STUDY MEN'S SALON, WWW.PATRICKSOFSYDNEY.COM.AU

Online viral campaigns rely on 'word of mouse' – the theory that if a customer likes something they're more inclined to share it with friends online.



Hey, big spender

Credit and charge card loyalty schemes reward high spenders, but you can easily lose out. CHOICE crunches the numbers to find the most rewarding cards.

nutshell

► We analysed 63 reward credit and charge cards, looking at frequent flyer points, shopping vouchers and cash rewards.
► If you spend only \$1000 per month or less, you're probably paying more in annual fees than you get back in rewards. Always pay your balance in full, of course.
► New credit cards from David Jones, Myer and Woolworths compared well in the shopping voucher category.

The sheer number of reward credit and charge cards on the market is one of the biggest indicators of their popularity, but you have to be increasingly canny to make sure you – and not the financial institutions – are the winner.

There are a couple of basic rules that govern successful use of these cards. The first is you must repay the balance in full each month. If you don't, there's little point even trying to compare the relative merits of each – the interest charges incurred will automatically wipe out any potential benefits.

The second is that thrift rarely pays. To get the most benefits, you need to spend big on your card. Just how much you spend, and where you spend it, will dictate the best option for you, as our comparative analysis shows.

Recent changes to Qantas' Frequent Flyer (QFF) reward cards mean many no longer offer QFF points; those that do now transfer points directly to a QFF account. So you should also consider whether your frequent flyer card offers the best value, especially now flights are so cheap.

What we looked at

CHOICE's analysis of reward credit and charge cards picks the best-value cards for three spending levels, \$1000, \$2000 and \$5000 monthly, after annual fees are paid. We looked at three popular categories.

- **Frequent-flyer points** – to pick the best frequent-flyer reward cards.
- **Shopping vouchers** – comparing the recently introduced David Jones, Woolworths and Myer cards with their competitors.
- **Cash rewards** – the most flexible rewards choice.

5.5 years The waiting time for a \$500 digital camera at a monthly spending rate of \$1000.

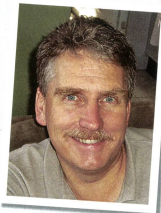
In general, the more you splurge, the more you benefit. Spend \$5000 a month and your best option is Qantas or Velocity (Virgin Blue's frequent-flyer scheme) points worth about \$1200 per year, even after deducting the annual fee. On the other hand, at a \$1000 monthly spending level, converting your points into shopping vouchers can drop you into the red by up to \$760 per year.

Do reward credit cards offer value for money?

On average, you need to notch up at least \$2000 in purchases per month (the Australian average is about \$1200) to get any positive return after deducting the annual fee, which ranges from zero to \$900, but the average is \$150.

Plunging points value

It's frustrating trying to save your points for more expensive rewards when their value takes a large drop every few years, as David from Sydney found out. Although the reward points earned via his credit card have unlimited life, David says they're now only worth a fraction of what they were when he first opened the account 14 years ago. At that time, 100,000 points could be redeemed for about \$1100 in David Jones vouchers, but now only translate into about \$640 of value at the same retailer.



The higher fees for platinum and gold cards mean these are really only suited to above-average spenders. Some of the perks include free travel insurance and better point conversion, unlimited concierge service at hotels and personalised rewards.

We've compared cash rewards and shopping vouchers (see tables, right) and specified the amount you earn for the spending level at which the card is a Best Buy.



Are cash rewards worth it?

Cash rewards work similarly to other rewards, but instead of choosing a toaster or shopping voucher out of the rewards catalogue, you usually get cash credited to your credit card account. An added bonus, of course, is that you can use the cash in stores of your choice or just repay your card.



How do the new store cards measure up?

In the second half of 2008, David Jones American Express and Woolworths Everyday Money MasterCard entered the fray, giving the Myer Visa card competition. These three major retailers' cards offer loyalty points that can be converted into gift cards to use in-store – a limiting factor compared with other reward programs that offer the choice of shopping vouchers for a large number of stores.

This aside, the Myer Visa and David Jones American Express cards scored well compared with other cards offering shopping vouchers. If you spend between \$1000 and \$2000 per month, Myer Visa gives you the best value of all shopping voucher cards, but does not rate well for higher spending levels as points earned outside the store are capped at 2000 per month. David Jones American Express is a Best Buy for \$2000 to \$5000 spending levels.

While the Woolworths MasterCard is not a Best Buy, it's the most flexible of the three as its vouchers can be used at the supermarket and some Woolworths-owned shops (such as Dan Murphy's and Tandy). Our analysis looked at points earned outside the stores, but all three cards give you more points when you shop with them. >

Did you know?

Play your cards right The total limit on all your credit cards can affect how much you can borrow for a home loan. Also, multiple credit-card applications over a short period can have a negative effect on your new applications for credit, such as a credit card, personal or home loan.

\$6600

for a \$50 toaster.

The total amount you need to spend on an average card to earn enough points

Unless you pay the balance on your reward card in full each month, the interest charges incurred will wipe out any potential benefits.

CASH REWARDS Best Buys

BEST BUY	Value for monthly spend (\$ pa)		
	\$1000	\$2000	\$5000
Card (in alphabetical order)			
American Express Gold Ascent	41		
American Express Gold Choices	34		
American Express Platinum Moneyback		141	501
Citibank Cash Back Visa	51	171	531
NAB Visa Mini	36		
Westpac Altitude (A)		140	500
Westpac Altitude Gold (A)			450
Westpac Altitude Platinum (A)			605

(A) More than one card attached; it is a Best Buy when spending is solely on the American Express card as it has a higher points conversion rate.

SHOPPING VOUCHERS Best Buys

BEST BUY	Value for monthly spend (\$ pa)		
	\$1000	\$2000	\$5000
Card (in alphabetical order)			
American Express Gold Choices	40		
American Express Gold Ascent	44		
GE Money Coles Group Source MasterCard	38		
Westpac Altitude (A)	43	186	614
Westpac Altitude Gold (A)			564
Westpac Altitude Platinum (A)			776

NEW RETAILER CARDS COMPARISON*

	\$1000	\$2000	\$5000
David Jones American Express	36	172	578
Myer Visa	81	201	201
Woolworths Everyday Money Rewards MasterCard	21	90	299

* Standard points used for all purchases; higher points can be earned by shopping at the retailer.

(A) More than one card attached; it is a Best Buy when spending is solely on the American Express card as it has a higher points conversion rate.

CHOICE believes banks could help consumers avoid fees by offering cards with a capped limit.



< Frequent-flyer rewards

We surveyed 41 cards offering QFF or Velocity points. On average, frequent-flyer programs give you the best value, but you have to be very flexible to get a seat for the

standard points program we've used in our analysis. Otherwise, you can book any available seat and fork out the corresponding points, which vary greatly. If the flight you want is in high demand, you're likely to pay a premium.

We found the best frequent-flyer cards are American Express ones, as they offer better points conversion. There was little difference in value of the Velocity- and QFF-associated cards – see table, opposite. (For our report on domestic airline satisfaction, see page 12.)

Penalty fees

All the credit cards we looked at charge penalty fees for missing the payment due date (\$33 on average) and for spending over your card limit (\$31 on average). CHOICE believes:

- the amount of these fees bears no relation to the cost incurred by the financial institution as a result of the consumer's default. For this reason they may be unlawful as well as unfair.
- some penalty fees have increased far more quickly than inflation.
- banks could easily help consumers avoid fees by offering credit cards with a capped limit, but they choose not to. ■

TIME TO EARN REWARDS AFTER SPENDING \$1000 PER MONTH*

Rewards type	\$100 reward (months)	\$500 reward (years)
Cashback	18	7.4
Shopping voucher	15	6.4
Travel voucher	14	5.7
Merchandise (such as a digital camera)	13	5.5
Velocity frequent flyer points	9	3.7
Qantas frequent flyer points	7	2.7

* Average spend for all the cards in this report.



CHOICE ONLINE

If you think your credit card company has charged you fees unfairly, read our guide on how to claim back your fees at www.choice.com.au/fairfees and have your say.

CALCULATING YOUR REWARDS

To calculate the total rewards value in a given category, we divided the number of points needed for a sample of rewards in the category by the dollar value of those rewards, which gives us the number of points needed for \$1 reward value.

We then calculate how much value you would get from your total annual reward points depending on your monthly spending level, and deduct the total annual fee (including annual card fees and rewards program fees if a separate fee is charged) from the total amount. The result is the dollar return on a card after fees.

We looked at the standard points earned, which doesn't include bonus points or promotional point offers. Point conversion rates and any point caps were taken into account.

These are the sample rewards we used.

- **Shopping voucher** \$50 voucher for a department or large store (David Jones, Myer) and \$50 voucher for another store (Bunnings, Officeworks). Higher points can be earned by shopping at the retailer: David Jones rewards shoppers with two points within the store compared with 1.5 points outside; Woolworths, two points in a Woolworths-owned store (includes Woolworths Liquor, Dick Smith and Big W) and three points for Woolworths Select products, compared with one point outside; Myer, three points in store compared with one point outside (Myer has a cap of a maximum of 2000 points per month earned outside its store).
- **Cash rewards** \$50 and \$100 cash reward.
- **Frequent flyer** Total of QFF or Velocity points for four return, economy-class flights spread over peak, off-peak and shoulder seasons, and booked three months in advance using standard-point options without taxes and charges. The flights used were Sydney-Melbourne, Melbourne-London, Brisbane-Auckland and Sydney-Bangkok.

CHOICE verdict

If you spend at least \$2000 each month on your card and always pay it off in full, a reward card can offer you value, especially if you choose one of our Best Buys.

On average, frequent-flyer programs give you the best value, as long as you're flexible and book well in advance to get a seat for the standard points programs we've used. Otherwise it may cost you many more points for your seat, which devalues your points.

The shopping cards from David Jones and Myer scored well in our survey and you may do well with them if you're a regular shopper in the particular store.

Cash rewards cards are a good option as you can use them to pay off your card.

FREQUENT FLYER CARDS

Card (in alphabetical order, within airline scheme)	Spend requirements	Total annual fee* (\$)	Unlimited points life**	Value for monthly spend (\$ pa)		
				\$1000	\$2000	\$5000
				QANTAS		
American Express Qantas		149	✓ (B)	44	237	815
American Express Qantas Premium		249	✓ (B)	-8	233	956
American Express Qantas Ultimate		450	✓ (B)	-161	128	996
American Express Platinum Ascent Premium (charge card)		900	✓ (B)	-611	-322	546
ANZ Frequent Flyer Visa		95	✓ (B)	98	242	531
ANZ Frequent Flyer Visa Gold		150	✓ (B)	43	236	573
ANZ Frequent Flyer Visa Platinum		195	✓ (B)	-2	191	528
Citibank Platinum Rewards/Qantas MasterCard/Visa		269	✓ (B)	-76	117	695
CBA Awards Qantas Frequent Flyer MasterCard		59	✓ (B)	37	134	343
CBA Gold Qantas Frequent Flyer MasterCard		114	✓ (B)	15	143	529
CBA Platinum Qantas Frequent Flyer MasterCard		200	✓ (B)	-7	186	764
Diners Club Frequent Flyer (charge card)		150	✓ (B)	43	236	814
NAB Qantas Gold (A)	All on American Express	145.5	✓ (B)	47	240	626
	All on Visa or MasterCard	145.5	✓ (B)	-17	112	367
NAB Qantas Platinum (A)	All on American Express	290	✓ (B)	-1	288	1156
	All on Visa	290	✓ (B)	-161	-33	353
Westpac Earth (A)	All on American Express	75	✓ (B)	118	311	889
	All on MasterCard	75	✓ (B)	21	118	407
Westpac Earth Gold (A)	All on American Express	125	✓ (B)	68	261	839
	All on MasterCard	125	✓ (B)	-29	68	357
Westpac Earth Platinum (A)	All on American Express	250	✓ (B)	39	328	1196
	All on MasterCard	250	✓ (B)	-154	-57	232
				VELOCITY		
American Express Ascent (charge card)		160	✓	36	233	822
American Express Gold Ascent (charge card)		210	✓	-14	183	772
American Express Platinum Ascent		395	✓	-100	194	1078
American Express Platinum Ascent Premium (charge card)		900	✓ (B)	-605	-311	573
ANZ Rewards Visa		48	3 yrs	39	127	316
ANZ Rewards Visa Gold		79	3 yrs	8	96	357
Citibank Gold Rewards MasterCard/Visa		119	✓	12	143	535
Citibank Platinum Rewards MasterCard/Visa		250	✓	-119	12	404
CBA Awards Velocity Frequent Flyer MasterCard		59	✓	39	137	350
CBA Gold Velocity Frequent Flyer MasterCard		114	✓	17	148	540
CBA Platinum Velocity Frequent Flyer MasterCard		200	✓	-4	193	782
NAB Velocity Standard (A)	All on American Express	65	✓	82	230	671
	All on Visa	65	✓	33	131	426
NAB Velocity Gold (A)	All on American Express	150	✓	46	243	832
	All on Visa	150	✓	-52	46	341
Westpac Altitude (A)	All on American Express	100	✓	96	293	882
	All on MasterCard/Visa	100	✓	-2	96	391
Westpac Altitude Gold (A)	All on American Express	150	✓	46	243	832
	All on MasterCard/Visa	150	✓	-52	46	341
Westpac Altitude Platinum (A)	All on American Express	295	✓	0	294	1178
	All on MasterCard/Visa	295	✓	-197	-99	196

TABLE NOTES

BEST BUY **ORANGE**
Best Buy.
BLUE Best Buy

for MasterCard/Visa.

* Includes annual

card fee and rewards

fee if separate.

Qantas Frequent

Flyer Program one-off

joining fee \$82.50

not included.

** For as long as you

keep the card.

(A) More than one

card attached;

spending is assumed

to be done solely

on the American

Express, MasterCard

or Visa as shown.

(B) Points are

directly transferred

to Qantas Frequent

Flyer scheme: normal

program conditions

apply. Points expire

if the account is not

used for three years.

Are you allergic?

Remember when peanut butter sandwiches were a staple on every kitchen table? Now, nut allergy rates are soaring. CHOICE investigates why, and what can you do if you think you have an allergy.

Peanut Butter.
Extra Health!



nutshell

▶ Nut allergies are growing at a faster rate than any other kind of food allergy, raising concerns about exposure to nuts for high-risk young children.

▶ Testing is available for food allergy and intolerance, but be wary of those not conducted by a GP, allergy specialist or paediatrician – some appear no more reliable than reading tea leaves.

Australia has one of the highest allergy rates in the world, and the number of people affected is growing at an astonishing rate. The number of children aged under five ending up in hospital with a life-threatening allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) increased fivefold in the decade to 2007.

According to experts, the explosion is a relatively new phenomenon. "The allergy wave hit 10 to 15 years ago. It's an epidemic ... and it's growing exponentially – we're swamped," says Dr Rob Loblay, head of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's (RPAH) allergy clinic in Sydney. But it's not every type of food allergy that's skyrocketing. Data from childcare centres in the ACT and Central Sydney Area Health Service shows while allergies to proteins in milk, eggs and seafood have remained steady, peanut allergies increased by 50% between 2003 and 2006, and cashew allergies, while less common overall, increased a staggering five times.

Why nuts? Why now?

There are a number of theories, all as yet unproven, which might explain the increase. It could be related to Western lifestyles – as countries become more developed and prosperous, allergy rates increase. According to Dr Andrew Kemp, Professor of Paediatric Allergy at Childrens' Hospital Westmead, Sydney, one explanation suggests a relationship between allergies and exposure to bacteria through soil and

CAN YOU GET ALLERGIES AT 30?

Allergies are usually discovered in childhood. Most problems in later life are likely to be intolerances. However, it is possible for adults to discover an allergy to something they've only recently come into contact with, such as insect stings, drugs or dust/pollen (after moving to a new environment).

animals; people living on farms are less affected than those in cities and towns. And experts such as microbiologist and immunologist Dr Mary Ruebush, author of the book *Why Dirt is Good*, argue that our modern dirt phobia means children's immune systems don't get the opportunity to develop properly, and this could play a part in this very modern problem. Other possible explanations include the timing of introduction of solids to babies, changes in food processing and the mother's diet during pregnancy.

Dr Anne Swain, Chief Allergy Dietitian at RPAH, also points to the changing consumption patterns of nuts. As the popularity, availability and affordability of a type of nut grows, she says, so do the allergy cases. "It's peanuts and cashews now, but walnuts and macadamias look like the next wave."

Tracing the source

You can't be allergic to something your body has never seen – there has to be a first exposure that sensitises a susceptible person, so that the next time he or she is confronted with that foreign protein their immune defence goes into overdrive.

Experts say there's an early window for sensitisation, around two to four months of age. So exposure to nut proteins via breast milk is one possibility. But there are

Did you know?

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune disease where the body's immune system reacts abnormally to the protein gluten, and attacks and damages the lining of the bowel. It spells a lifetime of avoiding gluten, which is found in wheat, rye, oats and barley. People with coeliac disease have a genetic predisposition to it, but as environmental factors play a part it can develop at any time. Blood tests can point to the disease, but diagnosis can only be confirmed by taking a biopsy of the small bowel and checking for damage.

FOOD ALLERGY OR INTOLERANCE?

	ALLERGY	INTOLERANCE
Symptoms	Eczema as a baby (especially on the face). Acute reactions: rash around mouth; hives / swelling; vomiting; difficulty breathing; anaphylaxis.	In adults, occasional, recurring or chronic: hives / swelling; stomach / bowel irritation; headaches / migraines; fatigue / aches / pains; mouth ulcers; sinus congestion / polyps. In children: irritable behaviour (colic, screaming, disturbed sleep, leg aches / pains, ADHD); reflux (from birth); eczema / itchy rashes; nappy rash.
Age when first noticed	Mostly infants and toddlers.	At any age – children or adults.
Speed of reaction	Immediate (from minutes to 1-2 hours). It happens every time you eat the food.	Can happen hours or days after eating the food. It may only happen sometimes.
Most likely food triggers	Specific food proteins: egg, milk, peanut, other nuts, sesame, fish, crustaceans.	Natural chemicals in foods: salicylates, amines, MSG. Additives in food (see <i>Not Quite Like Mother Made</i> , page 16-19).
How to test	Through your GP to an allergy clinic or specialist. Skin prick tests or blood (RAST) tests to measure IgE (see <i>Testing for Allergies and Intolerances</i> , page 40, for more information).	Through your GP to an allergy specialist or specialist dietitian or allergy clinic. An elimination diet and food chemical challenges can be used to track down the cause of the symptoms.
What can you do	Completely avoid the food(s) you are allergic to.	Comprehensive diet overhaul to keep chemical intake below your reaction level.
Most likely outcomes	Egg and milk allergy is usually outgrown. Most nut and seafood allergies (70%-80%) are lifelong.	Intolerances are usually lifelong, although symptoms and tolerance levels can come and go.

Source: RPAH Allergy Unit

other theories on the possible ways babies could be exposed, such as through smooches from dads after they've eaten nuts (broken skin from beard rash can allow the foreign proteins in), or through broken skin from eczema letting allergens in if there are nuts around. Nappy rash cream, which sometimes contains peanut oil, could also be a culprit, particularly as it's often used on broken skin.

More research is needed to find out what's really behind the trend, and a number of studies are under way. Llobay and Swain, for example, are investigating whether the risk could be reduced by minimising the likelihood of contact between baby and nut allergens during pregnancy, breastfeeding and in the first months of life. They say that while studies show changing the mother's diet during pregnancy and breastfeeding doesn't reduce the risk of allergy, they don't take into account other contact with nuts.

Is it a food intolerance?

It is the number of people with a food allergy, not intolerance, that is on the increase, according to experts. The difference between the two is often confused; many people think they are allergic when they are really intolerant to particular food chemicals. The table above explains the difference and how to work out which you might have.

According to Swain, many people have an intolerance, but haven't identified it as such; they just know they associate their migraines with chocolate, or feel awful after eating particular foods. It's not easy to measure how widespread this is, but as a rough estimate 10% to 15% of people may have some form of intolerance, with only a few experiencing serious problems. >

You cannot be allergic to something your body has never seen before – there must be a sensitising first exposure.

WHEN AND WHAT TO FEED BABY

At the end of 2008, the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA), peak body of Australian and New Zealand clinical immunologists and consultant allergy physicians, reviewed traditional advice for delaying the introduction of certain foods for babies. Previously, the advice for milk and eggs was to delay their introduction until about eight months, and nuts until two years old.

After reviewing the published evidence, ASCIA concluded there was no evidence that delaying allergenic foods, such as eggs or milk, actually prevented allergies.

The new ASCIA advice on infant feeding includes introducing foods the family eats (ensuring the texture is appropriate), starting by around six months old, when your baby is ready – ideally when breastfeeding. It advises starting with plain cereals, then adding a new family food every few days. ASCIA says there aren't any particular allergenic foods

that need to be avoided, although you should take care with the texture of foods to minimise the possibility of choking.

ASCIA's evidence also suggests it's possible, though not proven, that delaying introducing allergenic foods could contribute to higher allergy rates. Some studies are under way to find out whether earlier introduction of allergenic foods might actually help reduce the incidence of allergies in children.

The ASCIA advice is relevant to all babies, whether or not there's a family history of allergy or reason to think the baby might be at high risk. Some experts, however, suggest their high-risk families introduce new food cautiously; try a little on their lips or face first, for example.

For more information on allergies, go to the ASCIA website, www.allergy.org.au, where you can follow links to a list of allergy and immunology specialists in Australia and New Zealand.



Drying times

Not all clothes dryers are as quick and convenient as you might hope. CHOICE finds out which models do the job well – and fastest.

nutshell

- Four of the models on test have a "start on door shut" function, which is not recommended if you have curious children.
- Don't expect one full twist of the timer to completely dry your clothes – one model on test didn't.

In a country the size of Australia, the need for a clothes dryer fluctuates wildly from Tasmania through to the dry interior. But there is no arguing that when you need your clothes dried quickly, and in the absence of a clothes line or space for drying outdoors, dryers are extremely convenient.

HOW WE TEST

Performance Our testers put a standard wet load of washing (size depends on the dryer's capacity) into the dryer and measure how long it takes to dry and how much energy is used. If the dryer has a sensor to determine when the clothes are dry and automatically turn off, they use it; otherwise they test using the timer.

Ease of use is assessed according to how easy the controls are to use and how easy the filter is to access and clean.



CHOICE tested nine clothes dryers and included in the table on page 44 six previously tested models, two of which are gas powered and still on the market. All dryers on test have either a timer or sensor plus timer, and are vented (see What to Look For, page 45), which means they blow out the hot, damp air, unlike condenser dryers, which collect the water that evaporates from your clothes. All the dryers on test do the job that's required of them, so choosing one that's right for you comes down to capacity, drying time, environmental impact and how much you want to pay.

Safety first – automatic dryer doors

While it's convenient for the dryer to turn on automatically when you shut the door, a child climbing into the dryer and shutting the door behind them is a horrible but very real possibility. Dryers with this function are not really suitable for homes with small children or regular young visitors. >

What to buy \$

Our What to Buy list includes models in each size bracket, and of these, Best Buys are the cheapest to buy and run. We've nominated the gas dryers as Green Buys, since they're the best option if you're interested in reducing CO₂ emissions. The Rinnai is also cheaper to run than the rest, but expensive to buy and install.

LESS THAN 5KG

Simpson 39P400M

**BEST
BUY**

\$399

5KG TO 7KG

Simpson 39S600M

\$619

Simpson 39S500M

\$519

Rinnai Dry-Soft 6

\$1799

**GREEN
BUY**

LARGER THAN 7KG

Kleenmaid LGK37AWF3060

\$2999

**GREEN
BUY**



Pocket rockets

We test 26 compact and bridge cameras so you can see which type is best for you.

nutshell

► Bridge cameras come closest to SLRs for image control but are lighter and less expensive. ► Although compact cameras don't always mean less control, they are better suited to situations where you want to just point and shoot.

There are three basic categories of digital camera: compact, bridge and single lens reflex (SLR) – see *CHOICE*'s November 2008 test of SLR models. "Bridge" is a term used to describe a camera that fits somewhere between a compact and an SLR. For our purposes, a bridge camera must have a fixed long zoom – preferably one that starts with a wide angle. It has several manual functions, many of which can be easily accessed via dials or buttons, as well as a viewfinder, monitor and hot shoe for an external flash (see What to Look For, below).

As a general rule, a bridge camera is bigger and heavier than a compact but smaller and lighter than an SLR and generally costs less. Choosing which will

suit you is dependent on what sort of photos you like to take; a compact is the way to go if you prefer to leave all exposure and focus decisions to the camera.

A range of manual controls won't necessarily mean a big camera, as evidenced by the recommended Canon Digital Ixus 980 IS (see What to Buy, opposite). However, small cameras make it difficult to put lots of dials and buttons within easy reach, so a bridge camera is more suitable for critical manual control.

You should consider a bridge camera if you're interested in sports, nature or landscape photography, where the combination of a long zoom and manual options helps you control the image. >

What to look for

DIGITAL CAMERA FEATURES

A bridge camera should give you a near-SLR experience. The following features may also be found on the better compacts.

- **Zoom range** Big is better, but it's important to get one that starts at a reasonably wide angle (28mm), so you can use it for indoor shots and panoramas.

- **Viewfinder** This can be very handy for composing shots in bright sunlight. Look for clarity and accuracy.
- **Image stabilisation** With longer lenses it can be difficult to hold the camera still, which can lead to slightly blurry pictures. Image stabilisation can help by adjusting internally for camera movement.

Optical stabilisation is where the lens elements move, **mechanical** is where the light sensitive chip moves, while the generally ineffective **electronic stabilisation** uses the camera's processor to help stabilise the image.

A hot shoe connection allows you to attach a more powerful flash gun. Check to make sure the camera will recognise and control the external flash using its automatic exposure and white balance. Pop-up flashes are usually relatively low powered, but they're handy and don't take up much space.

LCD monitor All cameras in this test have a monitor at the back of the camera. Bridge and compact cameras allow you to preview the image before taking a photo.

Menu and function controls Quick access to these controls allows you to alter the camera to adapt to different situations. ISO, auto, manual, program and timer functions are handier on a dial rather than via a menu.



What to look for

ESSENTIAL DRYER FEATURES

- Controls** Some dryers have a timer that is set manually, while others have a sensor that detects when a load has reached a preset dryness level and automatically switches off. Some auto-sensing dryers have a manual timer as well.
- Filters** Dryer filters collect fluff quickly and need regular cleaning, so it's helpful if the filter is at the front. While most filters are on or near the door, those in the Rinnai and Homemaker models are located at the rear of the drum, and are hard to reach to remove and refit if they are floor-mounted or mounted too high.
- Wall-mountable or stackable on top of a front-loading washing machine** Mounting a dryer on the wall or putting it on top of a washing machine saves space in your laundry. The Kleenmaid gas dryer and Bosch can only be installed on the floor.
- Reverse tumbling** The drum reverses the direction of tumbling at regular intervals to minimise tangling while evenly drying clothes.

A **drying rack** can be mounted inside some models to hold items you don't want to tumble, such as gym shoes or delicates.

Vents/ducting How the moist, hot air from the dryer gets out of your laundry is important to prevent dripping walls and mouldy ceilings. If you have an exhaust fan or can put your dryer near a window, you may not need to worry about it; otherwise you're likely to need a venting kit. Some dryers come with one; while for others it's an optional extra (aside from the Haier, which cannot be ducted at all). However, not all ducting kits suit all situations. Discuss the installation with the sales staff to make sure you get what you need. Some dryers that have a vent at the front to exhaust the air cannot be ducted, making an exhaust fan or window more important. The table below shows which dryers are front-vented and whether they can be ducted.



SPECIFICATIONS							COSTS	
Ducting kit	Filter location	Unit starts on door shut	Type	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Contact	Running costs (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$)
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	4.0	60 x 80 x 51	www.simpson.com.au	865	399
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	4.5	57 x 81 x 56	www.fp.com.au	1064	599
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	4.5	57 x 81 x 56	www.fp.com.au	999	499
Optional	Door	✓	Electric	3.5	57 x 81 x 44	www.fp.com.au	794	429
Supplied	Inside rear	✓	Electric	4.0	60 x 70 x 44	www.kmart.com.au	822	299
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	6.0	61 x 80 x 62	www.simpson.com.au	1212	619
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	6.0	60 x 80 x 60	www.electrolux.com.au	1308	669
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	6.0	60 x 80 x 60	www.westinghouse.com.au	1308	639
Optional	Inside door	✓	Electric	5.0	60 x 85 x 53	www.kleenmaid.com.au	960	1499
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	5.0	60 x 80 x 55	www.simpson.com.au	1049	519
Supplied	Inside front	✓	Electric	5.0	60 x 85 x 53	www.boschappliances.com.au	991	899
Supplied	Inside rear	✓	Gas	6.0	65 x 69 x 53	www.rinnai.com.au	621	1799
Optional	Inside front	✓	Electric	5.0	60 x 80 x 56	www.westinghouse.com.au	1123	569
Supplied	Inside front	✓	Electric	6.0	60 x 85 x 57	www.fp.com.au	1380	699
Optional	Door	✓	Electric	6.0	60 x 83 x 56	www.haier.com.au	1276	499
Supplied	Inside rear	✓	Electric	5.5	60 x 70 x 57	www.kmart.com.au	999	499
Supplied	Inside front	✓	Gas	9.0	69 x 108 x 71	www.kleenmaid.com.au	1017	2999

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Energy efficiency: 40%
- Drying time: 40%
- Ease of use: 20%

The energy efficiency score takes into account only the energy used at the point of connection in your home; if we also included the production of energy, the gas dryers would improve significantly.

Features See What to Look For, above, for more on the features in the table.

Running costs This is based on drying a full load three times a week (156 times a year) for 10 years. It's calculated on electricity at \$0.17 per kWh and gas at \$0.016588 per megajoule (equivalent to \$0.06 per kWh).

Price Recommended retail, as of January 2009.

TABLE NOTES

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.

Newly tested models.
na Not available.

ns Not stated.

[] Square brackets indicate models that are technically similar and have the same performance scores; differences are minor or cosmetic.

Filters need frequent cleaning, but in some dryers they are at the rear of the drum and can be difficult to reach.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre, NSW, assessed the dryers' suitability for people with certain disabilities.

- If you're a wheelchair user, the Bosch is most suitable if it is wall-mounted and its door can be set to open to the left or the right. Both Homemaker models would be better if they were raised.
- For a person with back pain, the Rinnai and Homemaker models are not suitable because their filters are at the back and hard to reach.
- For someone with upper limb dysfunction, the dial-controlled Bosch and Simpson models or digital-controlled Westinghouse LD605E and LD505E would all be suitable, so long as they're located off the floor. Due to a smaller drum, a dryer with a lower capacity has better access and reach.
- The Haier and Westinghouse models would all be suitable for people with vision impairment as they have better contrast on their control panels and audio feedback when selecting a program.
- The Homemaker models are suitable for those with a cognitive impairment as they have very simple controls. Alternatively, the Haier has one-button operation if pre-programmed.



Ideally, dryer filters should be located inside the front door.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES				
	Overall score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Drying time score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cycle time (minutes)	Noise (dB)	Controls	Wall-mountable / stackable	Reverse tumbling	Drying rack	Temperature settings
LESS THAN 5KG											
Simpson 39P400M	72	67	67	93	103	54	Timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		Warm, hot
# Fisher & Paykel DE45F56EW1	69	67	60	92	145	58	Sensor + timer	✓ / ✓ -	✓	Supplied	Airing, low, regular
# Fisher & Paykel DE45F56AW1	69	64	62	93	135	58	Timer	✓ / ✓ -	✓	Optional	Regular, synthetics / delicates
# Fisher & Paykel DE35F56AW1	66	62	62	82	106	58	Timer	✓ / ✓ -	✓		Regular, synthetics / delicates
# Homemaker HM4088 (A)	66	71	55	78	145	58	Timer	✓ / ✓ -			Soft, strong
5KG TO 7KG											
# Simpson 39S600M	76	73	70	93	139	57	Timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		Warm, hot
Electrolux EDE605A	74	75	66	90	160	53	Sensor + timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		Delicates, normal, airing
Westinghouse LD605E	74	75	66	90	160	53	Sensor + timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		Delicates, normal, airing
# Kleenmaid KED301	74	71	68	93	128	55	Timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	Optional	Low, high
Simpson 39S500M	74	70	69	93	122	54	Timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		Warm, hot
Bosch WTA3003AU (A)	73	71	67	90	128	53	Timer	- / ✓ / ✓	✓	ns	Cupboard dry, iron dry, low heat
Rinnai Dry-Soft 6	73	58	80	88	88	59	Sensor + timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓		ns	General, extra soft, thick, delicates
Westinghouse LD505E	73	72	65	90	138	53	Sensor + timer	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		Delicates, normal, airing
# Fisher & Paykel DE60F60EW1	71	69	63	93	192	57	Sensor + timer	- / ✓ / ✓	✓		Extra dry, delicates, ready to wear, ready to iron, freshen up
# Haier HDY60	71	67	63	93	175	53	Timer	✓ / ✓ -		Supplied	Hot, cold
# Homemaker HMDGJY60 (A)	70	77	59	77	182	63	Timer	✓ / ✓ -			Soft, strong
LARGER THAN 7KG											
Kleenmaid LGK37AWF3060	70	46	82	93	117	56	Sensor + timer	- / -	ns	Supplied	Delicate, less dry, more dry

What to buy

Less than 5kg



BEST
BUY

72% Simpson
39P400M

PRICE \$399

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for ease of use.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

5kg to 7kg



76% Simpson
39S600M

PRICE \$619

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for ease of use.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.
- Best overall performer in any size range.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.



74% Simpson
39S500M

PRICE \$519

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for ease of use.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

CHOICE believes dryers that start up when the door is closed are not suitable for households with small children or young visitors.

5kg to 7kg continued



GREEN
BUY

73% Rinnai
Dry-Soft 6

PRICE \$1799

GOOD POINTS

- Low CO₂ contribution.
- Sensor and timer drying.
- Fast drying.
- Can be wall mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- The controls and filter are badly positioned if the dryer is floor-mounted.
- Requires a gas outlet in your laundry.
- No reverse tumble.

Larger than 7kg



GREEN
BUY

70% Kleenmaid
LGK37AWF3060

PRICE \$2399

GOOD POINTS

- Low CO₂ contribution.
- Excellent for ease of use.
- Sensor and timer drying.

BAD POINTS

- Can only be located on the floor.
- Requires a gas outlet in your laundry.
- Expensive.

About the rest

- The Electrolux EDE605A, Westinghouse LD605E and Kleenmaid KED301 all have excellent ease of use scores, but their purchase price is higher than the other models with a similar overall score.
- The Westinghouse LD505E has excellent ease of use and no bad points to mention, but isn't quite as good as the top models due to a slightly lower drying time score.
- The Bosch is the fourth most expensive after the Rinnai Dry-Soft 6 and Kleenmaid models.
- All the Fisher & Paykel models do the job, but the DE35F56AW1 and DE45F56AW1 models start automatically when the door closes and have only OK energy efficiency scores. The DE45F56EW1 also has an OK energy efficiency score, while the DE60F60EW1 is not wall-mountable – but is stackable – and, at three hours 12 minutes, has the longest drying cycle.
- Both Homemaker models scored less than 60% for drying time and start automatically. Cleaning the filters of both machines is also complicated.
- The Haier model cannot be ducted, but is equal quietest with the Electrolux, Bosch and Westinghouse models.

What to buy

Compact



66% Canon Digital Ixus 980 IS

PRICE \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Manual focus, white balance, shutter priority and aperture priority (but only two settings).
- Good flash performance.
- Excellent battery life score.
- Versatile camera.

BAD POINTS

- Maximum ISO setting 3200, with maximum resolution setting at two megapixels.
- Inaccurate and unclear viewfinder.

Bridge



70% Canon PowerShot G10

PRICE \$749

GOOD POINTS

- 28mm wide angle lens (good for indoors or landscape photography).
- Can store RAW files (which allows some extra exposure latitude when using software to manipulate images).
- Can resolve fine detail (especially in wide angle mode).
- Full manual exposure mode.
- Manual focus.
- Hot shoe for external flash.
- Can manually adjust microphone recording level.
- Microphone wind filter can be swapped.
- Quick to start up.
- Very versatile camera.

BAD POINTS

- Maximum ISO 3200 setting, with maximum resolution setting at two megapixels.
- Zoom is short for a bridge camera.
- Ineffective optical image stabilising system.
- Inaccurate and unclear viewfinder.



70% Canon PowerShot SX10 IS

PRICE \$649

GOOD POINTS

- 28mm wide angle lens (good for indoors or landscape photography).
- Huge zoom range.
- Very little vignetting in wide mode.
- Full manual exposure mode.
- Manual focus.
- Hot shoe for external flash.
- Monitor can be tilted both vertically and horizontally.
- Can manually adjust microphone recording level.
- Microphone wind filter can be swapped.
- Quick to start up.
- Very versatile camera.

BAD POINTS

- Accurate electronic viewfinder, but it lacks clarity.
- Maximum ISO 3200 setting, with maximum resolution setting two megapixels.

A compact camera is the way to go if you want to point and shoot, while a bridge camera is better for taking photos of sport, nature or landscapes.



CHOICE ONLINE

Go to www.choice.com.au/camera for an explanation of the jargon you're likely to come across when shopping for a digital camera.

CHEAPER COMPACT CAMERAS

As there are so many models that didn't make it onto our What to Buy list, we can't provide our usual About the Rest descriptions. However, even though cheaper cameras are almost always a compromise in quality, they may suffice if you're looking for a point-and-shoot model that doesn't hurt your bank balance too much. The following fit the bill.

- The Kodak EasyShare C913 (\$149) is a nine megapixel camera with a 36mm-108mm zoom. It's thicker and slightly heavier than the others in this group, but is small enough to fit in a purse. Exposure and focus settings are all automatic. Shutter delay is pronounced, taking up to a second to react, which makes it unsuitable for fast-moving sports. It also has trouble resolving detail in low light and its movie quality is the worst in the test. Its monitor quality is poor, it is not versatile and access to the AA batteries is difficult. Battery life, however, is good.

- The Samsung L201 (\$199) is a very small and light 10-megapixel camera with a 35mm to 105mm zoom. It has some useful manual exposure settings, but is limited to only two manual aperture settings. Our panel wasn't impressed with its image quality in auto and manual modes, and it doesn't resolve detail well in low light situations. Manual focusing is difficult, as is accessing its memory card. However, it does come with a rechargeable Li-ion battery, which is unusual in a cheaper camera.
- The Sanyo Xacti VPC-S870EX (\$149) is an eight megapixel camera with a 35mm to 105mm zoom. It has no viewfinder and doesn't come with an external power supply, so you have to rely on battery power even when downloading. It can take only three images at a time in continuous shooting mode. Its monitor lacks clarity, and it's difficult to focus manually. It also has well over a second shutter delay and comes with a poor instruction manual.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE								FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS				
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Image quality score (%)		Ease of use score (%)	Versatility score (%)	Viewfinder / monitor score (%)	Battery life score (%)	Flash score (%)	Movie quality score (%)	Manual shutter / aperture	Image stabilisation	Viewfinder	Effective resolution (megapixel)	Zoom range (35mm equivalent)	Memory type	Battery type
Canon PowerShot G10	70	64	72	83	44	100	65	63	✓ / ✓	Optical	Optical	Optical	15	28-140	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Canon PowerShot SX10 IS	70	62	69	85	54	100	68	59	✓ / ✓	Optical	Electronic	Electronic	10	28-560	SDHC	4x AA
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ28	67	59	66	71	62	100	66	62	✓ / ✓	Optical	Electronic	Electronic	10	27-486	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Canon Digital Ixus 980 IS	66	62	65	73	37	100	72	63	✓ / ✓	Optical	Optical	Optical	15	36-133	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX3	66	54	61	73	60	100	82	66	✓ / ✓	Optical	None (B)	None	10	24-60	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Canon Digital Ixus 870 IS	65	61	66	59	60	100	53	57	- / -	Optical	None	None	10	28-112	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Olympus SP-565UZ	65	58	57	83	52	100	73	45	✓ / ✓	Mechanical	Electronic	Electronic	10	26-520	xD	4x AA
Canon PowerShot A2000 IS	64	59	60	66	52	100	64	54	- / -	Optical	None	None	10	36-216	SDHC	2x AA
Nikon Coolpix P6000	63	63	56	75	39	99	65	49	✓ / ✓	Optical	Optical	Optical	13	28-112	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Canon PowerShot SX110 IS	61	56	62	68	57	67	70	53	✓ / ✓	Optical	None	None	9	36-360	SDHC	2x AA
Canon PowerShot E1	61	61	60	61	33	100	60	63	- / -	Optical	Optical	Optical	10	35-140	SDHC	2x AA
Casio Exilim EX-FH20	61	53	63	60	53	78	78	64	✓ / ✓	Optical	Electronic	Electronic	9	26-520	SDHC	4x AA
Fujifilm FinePix S2000HD	59	51	53	56	52	100	76	60	✓ / ✓	Mechanical	Electronic	Electronic	10	28-414	SDHC	4x AA
Nikon Coolpix S610	58	52	60	51	51	100	56	32	- / -	Optical	None	None	10	28-112	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Kodak EasyShare Z1015 IS	57	58	43	55	47	100	69	51	✓ / ✓	Mechanical	Electronic	Electronic	10	28-420	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Samsung L201	57	54	53	44	43	100	71	31	✓ / ✓ (A)	None	None	None	10	35-105	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Nikon Coolpix S710	56	56	51	53	46	100	52	28	✓ / ✓	Optical	None	None	14	28-101	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Olympus FE-370	56	50	54	37	51	100	69	37	- / -	Mechanical	None	None	8	36-180	xD	1x Li-ion
Pentax Optio M60	56	56	56	54	41	73	63	37	- / -	None	None	None	10	36-180	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Samsung NV100HD	56	55	56	50	52	59	76	46	✓ / ✓	Optical	None	None	14	28-102	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Olympus µ 1040	55	53	53	47	48	85	63	47	- / -	None	None	None	10	38-114	xD ⁺	1x Li-ion
Fujifilm FinePix F60fd	55	59	55	51	43	68	50	40	✓ / ✓	Mechanical	None	None	12	35-105	SDHC or xD	1x Li-ion
Kodak EasyShare M1093 IS	54	55	53	39	40	99	39	48	- / -	Optical	None	None	10	35-105	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Ricoh Caplio GX200	54	58	20	65	58	100	77	34	✓ / ✓	Mechanical	None (C)	None	12	24-72	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Nikon Coolpix S60	49	53	49	47	35	48	59	34	- / -	Mechanical	None	None	10	33-165	SDHC	1x Li-ion
Kodak EasyShare C913	48	55	44	29	24	87	55	22	- / -	None	None	None	9	36-108	SDHC	2x AA
Sanyo Xacti VPC-S870EX	48	55	44	43	30	100	54	33	- / -	None	None	None	8	35-105	SDHC	2x AA

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Image quality: 30%
- Ease of use: 25%
- Versatility: 12%
- Viewfinder/monitor: 12%
- Battery life: 10%
- Flash: 8%
- Movie quality: 3%

A manual aperture/shutter allows you to select either the shutter speed or lens aperture while the camera determines the overall exposure. This is handy for control in circumstances where a fast shutter speed is

important, such as sports, or choosing a small aperture to increase the depth of focus in the image.

Image stabilisation Although optical and mechanical image stabilisation have the potential to provide a useful aid to taking images in low light situations, only the Olympus SP-565UZ and Casio Exilim EX-FH20 can manage a useful outcome. Most of the rest that have this feature are very poor performers. Digital forms of image stabilisation often introduce noise in the image, or provide almost no

advantage. A tripod or solid base for the camera is still the best solution. **A viewfinder** provides an alternative to the LCD monitor when taking a shot in bright conditions.

Effective resolution This calculation is based on the maximum number of pixels the camera uses to create an image.

Zoom range A 35mm equivalent figure indicates a range comparable to a 35mm film-based camera.

Memory type
• xD: xD card

• **SDHC:** Secure Digital High Capacity card is an extension of the SD card format with a larger capacity up to 32GB, and looks exactly the same as an SD card.

Batteries Li-ion batteries are rechargeable. None of the cameras that take Li-ion batteries can also use normal alkaline batteries. Those specifying "AA" can use alkaline, lithium or rechargeable AA battery. **Shutter delay** The time it takes from the moment the shutter button is pressed to the moment the picture

	Shutter delay for 1m / 10m (sec)	Start-up time (sec)	Delay between continuous shots (sec)	ISO (light sensitivity)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)*	Weight (g)**	Price (\$)
x 45	0.3 / 0.4	2.23	0.67	80-1600	11.5 x 8 x 5	424	749
x 38	0.4 / 0.3	2.00	0.66	80-1600	12.5 x 9 x 10.5	712	649
x 40	0.7 / 0.7	2.75	0.52	100-1600	12.5 x 8 x 10.5	448	769
x 37	0.4 / 0.5	2.19	0.67	80-1600	10 x 6.5 x 3	185	599
x 41	0.8 / 0.7	4.02	0.51	80-3200	12 x 6.5 x 5	278	829
x 45	0.4 / 0.4	1.64	0.65	80-1600	9.5 x 6 x 2.5	181	499
x 38	0.5 / 0.8	3.26	1.04	64-1600	11.5 x 8.5 x 9.5	519	599
x 45	0.5 / 0.5	2.27	0.7	80-1600	10.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	251	299
x 40	0.7 / 1	2.98	1.08	64-2000	11 x 7 x 4.5	288	799
x 45	0.6 / 0.5	2.83	0.71	80-1600	11 x 7 x 4.5	311	399
x 38	0.5 / 0.5	2.40	0.7	80-1600	10.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	223	249
x 46	0.6 / 0.5	3.88	0.03	100-1600	13 x 8.5 x 9.5	641	2599
x 41	0.5 / 0.7	2.75	1.79	100-1600	11 x 8 x 9	539	449
x 45	0.4 / 0.3	1.34	0.8	100-3200	10 x 6 x 3	152	449
x 45	1 / 1.2	3.93	0.81	80-1600	12 x 8.5 x 9.5	444	349
x 40	0.6 / 0.5	3.06	0.85	80-1600	9 x 6 x 2.2	131	199
x 45	0.5 / 0.9	4.19	0.65	100-3200	9.5 x 6 x 3	184	599
x 40	0.8 / 0.2	2.63	0	64-1600	10 x 6 x 2.5	146	249
x 37	0.2 / 0.3	3.71	1.8	64-1600	10 x 5.5 x 2.5	129	369
x 46	0.2 / 0.5	1.91	1.34	80-1600	10 x 6 x 3	163	549
x 40	0.8 / 0.4	2.14	0.1	50-1600	9 x 6 x 2	123	299
x 45	0.5 / 0.5	2.68	2.73	100-1600	9.5 x 6 x 3	184	399
x 45	0.4 / 0.6	2.40	0.57	64-3200	10 x 6 x 2.1	151	299
x 40	1.7 / 1	2.39	0.71	64-1600	11.5 x 6.5 x 4.5	244	799
x 43	0.6 / 0.7	3.32	2.03	64-2000	10 x 6 x 2.3	164	549
x 35	1 / 0.6	3.18	0	80-1000	9.5 x 6.5 x 4	202	149
x 36	1.3 / 1.4	4.67	0.59	80-1000	9.5 x 6.5 x 3	185	149

TABLE NOTES

* Includes all protruding parts when the camera is switched off.

** Includes batteries, memory cards and neck strap if supplied.

na Not available/applicable.

(A) Only two settings.

(B) Optional optical.

(C) Optional electronic.

aken. A time is included to indicate the delay when focusing a subject at close range (1m) or medium range (10m).

Start-up time The time delay between turning on the camera and being ready to take a photo.

Delay between continuous shots Measures the time taken from the shutter release on one shot to the shutter release of another in continuous shooting mode.

Prices Recommended retail, as of January 2009.

HOW WE TEST

Camera testing is a complicated and expensive process. To help with the high cost, CHOICE shares the results with a number of consumer organisations around the world. All the tests and procedures are overseen by professional testers in laboratories in Europe. There are seven basic categories we use to create each assessment. We also gather information on extra features and perform some other tests, but the following descriptions are of the basic tests that make up the scores in the table.

Overall image quality Our testers report on colour reproduction, distortion, focus, resolution and vignetting indoors and outdoors.

Ease of use Our testers score the manuals; clarity and accuracy of the viewfinder and LCD monitor; settings both in the menu system and on the camera; ease of focusing manually and using the autofocus setting; access to the battery and how much information is supplied on battery charge, as well as sensitivity of the shutter button. They also measure the camera's shutter delay, the time it takes to go from off to being able to take an image and how long it takes between taking images in continuous mode.

Versatility Our testers calculate the real resolution of the largest image, as well as check the lens' aperture and zoom range, ISO range, maximum and minimum shutter speed, number of image quality settings, white balance and exposure settings, type and adjustment of the monitor and viewfinder, deleting options, flash types and connections, battery type and charging options, focusing and macro options, and audio and video connections and options. They include the shutter delay and camera-ready scores because these have direct impact on the circumstances in which the camera can be used, and look for any other useful connections or functions.

Viewfinder/ monitor accuracy Our testers assess clarity and accurately measure the amount of distortion and inaccuracy between what's seen in the viewfinder and/or monitor and what's in the image.

Battery life Using a cycle that includes turning the camera on and off, zooming, taking an image with and without flash and playing back and deleting an image, we assess how long the battery lasts on a full charge.

Flash Our testers check the flash's ability to produce enough light and even illumination from one, three and five metres.

Movie quality is assessed by a panel of testers. They watch three movies recorded in the highest quality mode and displayed via the camera's AV output on a high quality TV monitor.

CAMERA CONTACTS

Canon www.canon.com.au

Casio www.casio-intl.com doesn't have a distributor in Australia, but they can be bought online. Check the warranty applies in Australia.

Fujifilm www.fujifilm.com.au

Kodak www.kodak.com.au

Nikon www.nikon.com.au

Olympus www.olympus.com.au

Panasonic www.panasonic.com.au

Pentax www.crkennedy.com.au

Ricoh www.tasco.com.au

Samsung www.samsung.com.au



Light my fire

No longer just a useful appliance, cooktops are now stylish and flexible.

nutshell

► On test: nine gas cooktops under \$1600 and one priced at \$3999.

► We don't recommend models without flame failure as we believe they all should have this safety feature.

► Only one cooktop had a good result for cooking rice; most had a poor score, which we believe is due to factory settings.

Design freedom for the homeowner is a major selling point of a cooktop, as they give you the flexibility of having a separate oven placed anywhere in the kitchen, at waist level or higher if required. With their sleek stainless steel, glass or enamel surfaces, cooktops can look incredibly stylish as well.

CHOICE put 10 gas cooktops to the test, looking at their cooking performance, ease of use (including cleaning) and safety features. Our testing revealed that while most perform very well, some fall short in terms of safety. The Blanco, Chef, Emilia and Whirlpool models were all good or very good at cooking and ease of use, but don't have flame failure protection (see What to Look For, opposite). We asked manufacturers why some models don't include this feature and were told flame failure is not mandatory, and would potentially drive up the cost of the cooktop. CHOICE believes it should be made a standard requirement, so we can't recommend models without this feature. To check whether your gas cooktop has flame failure protection, look for two small rods sticking up next to the burner. One is for the ignition (all ignition systems are electric) and the other detects the flame.

Rice not so nice?

The majority of cooktops on test all scored poorly for cooking rice, leaving it either mushy or stuck to the bottom of the pan (see the table, page 52 for rice-cooking scores). Cooking rice in our test method determines the turn-down capacity of the cooktops, and our home economist feels that rice sticking to the bottom of the pan is probably due to the factory setting being set too high.

If you purchase a cooktop and experience this problem, it may be resolved with a service call to adjust the flame. >

What to buy \$

Fisher & Paykel CG604CWFW1	\$849
Westinghouse GHP765S	\$849



CHOICE ONLINE

For more information on cooktops, including gas, electric and combination models, visit our Cooktop Buying Guide at www.choice.com.au/cooktops.

HOW WE TEST

Cooking performance We use the following tests to assess the cooktops' cooking performance.

- **White sauce** To assess the ability of the gas cooktop to cook at low temperatures for a prolonged period of time.
- **Rice** To assess the ability and speed of the burner to boil rice, maintain a desired level of heat at lowest temperature setting and assess the "turn down" capacity (thermostatic control) of the hotplate.
- **Stir fry** To assess the wok burner's ability to deliver the desired continuous high heat.
- **Melted chocolate** To determine if gas cooktops are capable of cooking foods that are very sensitive to high temperatures.

Ease of use To assess the ease of use of the cooktops, our tester looks at the stability of the trivets, layout of burners, whether the pots fit comfortably and the pans are supported. Our tester also looks at how easy the controls are to use in relation to their size, labelling and position. She assesses ease of cleaning the surface, controls, trivets and burners, and whether there are appropriate spill-catchment areas.



What to look for

GAS COOKTOP FEATURES

- Cleaning** Look for a surface that's easy to clean and a design without dirt traps. A good cooktop should be able to effectively contain reasonable spills; some ceramic cooktops don't have a lip or rim to do this. As a rule, enamel cooktops are easier to keep clean than glass or stainless steel. Knobs should be easy to remove for cleaning underneath.
- Size and shape of cooktop** The most popular is a square-shaped cooktop, approximately 60cm wide. You can also buy rectangular models with burners/elements in various configurations. Make sure you have the necessary space on your bench to fit the cooktop, as well as ventilation space underneath (measure the available bench space before you go shopping). Stores should have brochures with the specifications. There's a minimum distance requirement for the bottom of cupboards or rangehood above a cooktop – check before buying.
- Position of burners** Consider the position and layout of the burners/elements and their size in relation to the pots and pans you usually use. Configurations that are spaced so that you don't reach over one burner/element to get to another – usually on rectangular units – are generally easier to use. Simmer elements/burners should be at the front so you don't have to lean over other burners to stir a sauce.

Burners Gas burners are rated in megajoules per hour (MJ/h), the amount of energy each uses on its maximum setting. Four-burner cooktops should have a good range of heat ratings, from low (about 3.5MJ/h-5MJ/h) to high (up to 10MJ/h or 11MJ/h), and wok burners should be about 12MJ/h-15MJ/h. Burner sizes vary from about 4cm-7cm in diameter. Wok burners should be at the front for accessible continuous stirring of food. Single-piece burners are easier to clean and maintain.

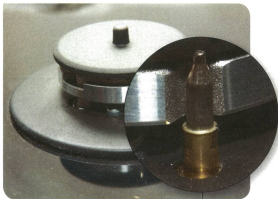


Controls Look for knobs that are a good size, ideally with a crossbar so they're easy to grip, and a clear pointer. Controls should not be positioned too close to the burners or the burners.

Trivets or pan supports should be flat and stable on the hob. Those with rubber feet are less likely to move than those without, and won't scratch the hob surface. Enamel trivets are lighter and easy to clean as they can be soaked, but require rubber feet for stability, while cast iron trivets are more stable but also heavier, rust-prone and not as easy to clean.

SAFETY FEATURES

- Push-down knobs** Knobs that have to be pushed down before they can be turned means you won't accidentally knock them while cleaning, and are harder for children to operate.



Flame-failure feature Some cooktops have a flame-failure feature which either automatically cuts out the gas or reignites it if the flame goes out. If you want to use a gas cooktop in a high-rise building of 25m or taller, you may be obliged to install a model with flame-failure protection – check with your local council.

A good cooktop should be able to contain spills, be easy to clean and not have dirt traps.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

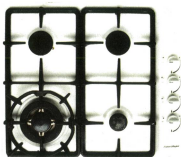
Below are the models recommended by the Independent Living Centre, NSW, however, the Blanco, Chef and Emilia don't have flame failure protection and are not recommended by CHOICE.

- For wheelchair users, most cooktops are suitable with easy-to-reach controls, however the Chef, Emilia and Fisher & Paykel CG604CWFW1 are slightly less easy to use.

- For those with upper limb dysfunction, the Chef and Emilia have enamel trivets which are easy to clean and their controls are easy to handle and use.
- People with vision impairment need labelling that's easy to see and contrasts with the background. The Chef, Fisher & Paykel Izona CookSurface and Blanco are best.
- Generally, gas cooktops are not recommended for those with a cognitive impairment, but if you buy one, make sure it has a flame-failure safety device.

CHOICE believes flame failure protection should be a mandatory safety feature of all cooktops, and so we can't recommend any models without it.

What to buy



84% Fisher & Paykel CG604CWFW1

PRICE \$849

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for white sauce and melted chocolate.
- Excellent ease of use.
- Flame failure cut out.
- Wok trivet provided.
- Controls positioned to avoid easy access for children.

BAD POINTS

- Poor result for cooking rice.



82% Westinghouse GHP765S

PRICE \$849

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for white sauce, stir fry and melted chocolate.
- Very good performance.
- Very good ease of use.
- Flame failure cut out.
- Wok trivet provided.
- Labelling has a grading line from high to low temperature setting.

BAD POINTS

- Poor result for cooking rice.
- Controls are positioned at the front of the cooktop, allowing easy access for children.
- Labelling is bonded and can scratch off or fade after prolonged cleaning.

About the rest

The remainder of the gas cooktops rate well, however there are some issues our tester encountered.

- Areas of the trivets are very close to the controls on the Electrolux, Baumatic and Blanco and can be accidentally touched when at dangerously hot temperatures.
- The Fisher & Paykel Izona CookSurface has loads of features and looks impressive, but is very expensive and isn't as good as the others for cooking performance. It also only has three burners (for more information, see Space Age Cooking, opposite).
- The Smeg is the lowest scorer overall in the test and although it has four burners, it can only accommodate three pots at one time.
- Even though all are good or very good performers overall, we cannot recommend the Chef, Emilia, Blanco or Whirlpool as none has a flame-failure safety feature, a feature we believe should be made standard.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE							FEATURES	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance (%)	Ease of use (%)	Rice cooking score (%)	White sauce score (%)	Stir fry score (%)	Melted chocolate score (%)	Trivet type	Cooktop surface material
WITH FLAME FAILURE PROTECTION									
Fisher & Paykel CG604CWFW1	84	78	93	35	95	80	100	Cast iron	Enamel
Westinghouse GHP765S	82	80	85	35	95	90	100	Cast iron	Stainless steel
Electrolux Eline EHGC77BS	75	75	75	35	95	70	100	Cast iron	Ceramic glass
Baumatic BA62SS	74	75	73	35	95	70	100	Cast iron	Stainless steel
Fisher & Paykel Izona CookSurface	74	73	75	35	95	80	80	Non-stick	Ceramic glass
Smeg CIR60XS	72	75	68	35	85	80	100	Cast iron	Stainless steel
WITHOUT FLAME FAILURE PROTECTION									
Chef GHC615W	81	74	92	35	95	65	100	Enamel	Enamel
Emilia SEC64GW1	81	80	82	45	85	90	100	Enamel	Stainless steel
Blanco BCGC74B	80	83	75	75	95	60	100	Cast iron	Crystal glass
Whirlpool AKT616IX	79	79	80	50	95	70	100	Enamel	Stainless steel

SPACE AGE COOKING

Included in our report is the Fisher & Paykel Izona CookSurface, the most expensive cooktop on test at \$3999. But it's no average cooktop: the Izona has three gas burners with retractable pan supports, electronic controls and a sleek ceramic glass surface. It also has a number of safety features, including flame reignition should the flame go out, automatic cool-down response, heat warning indicators, audio and visual feedback and a child lock.

For cooking performance, the Izona ranked lowest (however, it is still good) and for ease of use it is also one of the lowest. Our tester found cleaning it somewhat difficult as it has no spill catchment area and allows spills to run around the surface. The ceramic glass surface requires a little more effort to clean than other surfaces, and although the trivets and burner are easy to remove there are lots of pieces to clean.

Although all the extra bells and whistles are nice to have, at almost \$4000 it's a high price to pay for a gas cooktop that scores lower for performance and ease of use than Fisher & Paykel's \$849 top-scoring model, the CG604CWF1.



All the extras are nice to have, but at nearly \$4000, the Izona is not as easy to use and does not perform as well as a model less than a quarter its price tag.

SPECIFICATIONS

	Control position	Dimensions (cm, W x D)*	Cut-out dimensions (cm, W x D)*	Contact	Price (\$)
Two burners: small burner, medium burner (x2), wok burner	Side	58 x 50	56 x 48	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	849
Four burners: small burner, medium burner, large burner, wok burner	Front	59 x 51	56 x 48	www.westinghouse.com.au	849
Four burners: small burner, medium burner, large burner, wok burner	Front	75 x 53	56 x 48	www.electrolux.com.au	1589
Four burners: small burner, medium burner (x2), wok burner (A)	Front	59 x 50	56 x 48	www.thinkappliances.com	879
Three burners: small burner, medium burner, wok burner	Front	90 x 41	87 x 39	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	3999
Four burners: small burner, medium burner, large burner, wok burner	Front	60 x 50	56 x 48	www.smegappliances.com.au	990
Four burners: small burner, medium burner (x2), wok burner	Side	60 x 54	57 x 48	www.chefappliances.com.au	549
Four burners: small burner, medium burner (x2), wok burner	Side	58 x 50	56 x 48	www.emiliaappliances.com.au	569
Four burners: small burner (x2), medium burner, wok burner	Front	68 x 50	65 x 47	www.blanco-australia.com	1199
Four burners: small burner, medium burner (x2), large burner	Front	59 x 51	56 x 48	www.whirlpool.com.au	544

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Cooking performance: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%

Features See What to Look For, page 51.

Price Recommended retail, as of January 2009.

TABLE NOTES

* Rounded to the nearest centimetre.
(A) The wok burner is a dual burner with a simmer only option.



Hands-on approach

These handheld vacuum cleaners are handy for cleaning up small messes.

nutshell

- ▶ All the models on test are good overall performers, but some aren't effective at cleaning grit from a car floor or picking up pet hair.
- ▶ Most have a useful running time of about 12 minutes or more.
- ▶ They're very noisy – noisier even than full-sized vacuums.

Handheld vacuum cleaners have come a long way since CHOICE last tested them in 2000. Generally, they run longer and are much better at picking up dirt and debris, including pet hair. However, they are also more expensive – in some cases, much more expensive. And they're noisier than most standard vacuum cleaners; if you use one frequently, you should consider wearing hearing protection, although for only occasional use this isn't necessary.

While handheld vacuums cost a lot more than a simple dustpan and brush, there are some tasks for

which they're ideal, such as cleaning the inside of a car. They can also be used on other small household messes so you don't have to drag out the large vacuum each time. Our test puts handheld vacs through all sorts of cleaning tasks you might commonly encounter around the house and in the car. >

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Look for a model that is reasonably lightweight and well balanced with a comfortable grip. An on/off switch rather than a trigger can be easier to use, as it doesn't require constant pressure on the switch to keep the vacuum running. The dust receptacle and filter should be easy to remove, and the vacuum should slide easily into and out of its cradle. Large, easy-to-read labels and indicator lights are also important if you have visual impairment. The models that best fit these criteria are the Vax Marvel, Shop Vac and Piranha, but all of these have some shortcomings (see What to Buy and About the Rest, page 56).

What to buy

Black & Decker Dustbuster Pivot 18V PHV1800-XE	\$170
Black & Decker Dustbuster Pivot 12V PV1205B-XE	\$130
Dyson Motorhead DC16BZ-MH	\$349
Breville 12V Vac Master Wet/Dry Vacuum BHV9	\$85
Vax Extreme Power 15.6V Cordless Hand Vac VR-260	\$79
Vax Marvel 48000	\$60

BEST BUY

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE										FEATURES			
	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Hard floor score (%)	Carpet score (%)	Sand / gravel score (%)	Pet hair score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Measured running time on full charge (minutes)	Stated recharging time (hours)	Noise (dB)	Charger	Cradle	Self-tapping screws	AC adapter
Cordless														
Black & Decker Dustbuster Pivot 18V PHV1800C-XE	88	94	97	100	90	80	81	16	16	85	✓	✓	2	
Black & Decker Dustbuster Pivot 12V PV1205B-XE	85	89	97	100	60	80	81	12	16	83	✓	✓	2	
Dyson Motorhead DC16BZ-MH	85	88	100	100	50	80	81	6	3	80	✓	✓	2	✓
Breville 12V Vac Master Wet/Dry Vacuum BHV9	82	76	77	100	60	40	88	16	ns (A)	76	✓	✓	2	
Vax Extreme Power 15.6V Cordless Hand Vac VR-260	81	81	97	100	40	50	80	16	24	88	✓		2	✓
Vax Marvel 48000	81	82	77	100	70	70	80	22	24	80	✓		2	✓
Black & Decker Dustbuster Extreme 7.2V DV7205-XE	72	69	63	100	30	60	74	12	16	75	✓	✓	2	
Electrolux Rapido Cyclonic 12V ZB412	71	71	77	100	50	20	71	19	16	78	✓		3	✓
Shop Vac ToolMate 149	70	75	80	100	40	50	65	16	ns (B)	74				✓
Mains powered (corded)														
Piranha Hand Held Vacuum ZB500-28	78	77	67	100	60	70	78	na	na	86				✓

What to look for

HANDHELD VACUUM CLEANER ESSENTIALS

- **Switch** An on/off switch is easier for continuous operation than a trigger that needs to be held down. The Dyson is the only trigger model on test.
- **Adjustable nozzle/attachments** These make it easy to adjust the cleaner for different tasks, such as cleaning crevices and other awkward locations.
- **Charging time** The quicker the charging time, the sooner you can reuse the cleaner. The Breville and Shop Vac don't state their recharging time.
- **Battery** Nickel-metal hydride (NiMH) and lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries are generally more environmentally friendly than nickel-cadmium (NiCd) and lead-acid batteries.

Fallout flap This prevents dirt falling back out of the vacuum when you carry it with the nozzle facing downwards, such as when moving between cleaning tasks. The Dyson has no flap and the Shop Vac and Vax Marvel have ineffective ones, so with these you should avoid carrying the cleaner nozzle downwards.



Filter This should be easy to remove and clean or replace.

HOW WE TEST

The vacuums are fully charged before each test. The Breville and Shop Vac claim to vacuum liquids and wet material, but we didn't test this feature.

Hard floor Our tester spreads one cup of cornflakes on a hard surface and assesses how well the cleaner picks them up. The test is repeated with one cup of sugar and again with one cup of flour.

Carpet Our tester spreads one cup of potting mix on carpet and assesses how well the cleaner picks it up. The test is repeated with one cup of sand.

Sand/gravel A mixture of 200g of sand and 100g of small gravel is spread on a car's floor and in its boot, then vacuumed.

Pet hair is embedded into a section of carpet and then vacuumed.

Ease of use Our tester assesses each cleaner for ease of emptying the receptacle and cleaning the filters; vacuuming along edges and in corners; effectiveness of the fallout flap; and effectiveness of the filters (by checking whether any sand is blown out through the exhaust while cleaning).

Running time Our tester picks up dry, uncooked rice using the highest power setting until the cleaner is too low on power to pick up any more.

Noise Measured one metre from the cleaner.

accessories
supplied

SPECIFICATIONS

	Weight (kg)	Contact	Price (\$)
vacuum tool, brush tool	1.8	www.blackanddecker.com.au	170
brush tool	1.6	www.blackanddecker.com.au	130
vacuum tool, motorhead tool, combination tool	1.5	www.dyson.com.au	349
placement filter, crevice tool, brush tool	1.6	www.breville.com.au	85
	1.5	www.vax.com.au	79
vacuum tool, brush tool	1.6	www.vax.com.au	60
vacuum tool, brush tool	1.1	www.blackanddecker.com.au	80
vacuum tool, brush tool	1.4	www.electrolux.com.au	109
vacuum tool, square brush tool, squeegee tool	0.7	www.shopvac.com.au	29
vacuum tool, multi-purpose brush, carpet and upholstery brush	1.5	www.hegroup.com.au	39

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance: 50%
- Ease of use: 50%

Performance is made up of:

- Hard floor: 33.3%
- Carpet: 33.3%
- Sand/gravel: 16.65%
- Pet hair: 16.65%

Ease of use is made up of:

- Emptying dust receptacle: 25%
- Cleaning edges and corners: 25%
- Fallout flap: 25%
- Filter effectiveness: 25%

Noise is measured at one metre from the nozzle – 70dB is equivalent to a noisy standard vacuum cleaner, while 85dB is equivalent to traffic noise near a major road.

Price Recommended retail, as of February 2009.

TABLE NOTES

ns Not stated.

na Not applicable.

(A) 24 hours for initial charge.

(B) Charge overnight for initial charge.

What to buy



88% Black & Decker Dustbuster Pivot 18V PHV1800-XE

PRICE \$170

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent performer; the only model that performed well in every test.
- Nozzle can be set to different angles.
- Brush attachment (stored with cradle).
- Two speeds.

BAD POINTS

- Heaviest unit in the test.
- Comparatively expensive.
- Requires some finger strength to disassemble.
- Very noisy.



82% Breville 12V Vac Master Wet/Dry Vacuum BHV9

PRICE \$85

GOOD POINTS

- Good performer.
- Very effective fallout flap.
- Attachments (stored with cradle).
- Can vacuum liquids (not tested).

BAD POINTS

- Cornflakes jammed in the dust flap.
- Poor at removing pet hair from carpet.
- Requires some finger strength to disassemble.
- Recharging time is not stated, other than initial charge of 24 hours.



85% Black & Decker Dustbuster Pivot 12V PV1205B-XE

PRICE \$130

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performer.
- Nozzle can be set to different angles.
- Very effective fallout flap.
- Brush attachment (stored on vacuum).
- Two speeds.

BAD POINTS

- Only OK for cleaning sand and gravel from car floor.
- Requires some finger strength to disassemble.
- Very noisy.



81% Vax Extreme Power 15.6V Cordless VR-260

PRICE \$79

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performer.
- Very effective fallout flap.
- Brush and crevice tool integral to vacuum.
- Very easy to disassemble and clean.

BAD POINTS

- Poor at cleaning the car as it ran out of charge before finishing (but was doing a reasonable job).
- Some of the sucked-up sand and dust can blow through the exhaust.
- Advises 24 hours to recharge.
- Noisiest model on test.



85% Dyson Motorhead DC16BZ-MH

PRICE \$349

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performer.
- The only unit to score 100% on hard floors.
- Motorised rotary head attachment.
- Claimed recharge time of only three hours.

BAD POINTS

- Only six minutes of running time.
- Mediocre score for cleaning sand/gravel as it ran out of charge (but was doing a good job).
- No fallout flap.
- Trigger must be held down to run.
- Very noisy and very expensive.



81% Vax Marvel 48000

PRICE \$60

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performer.
- Very easy to disassemble and clean.
- Four-level charge indicator.

BAD POINTS

- Comparatively small dust receptacle (could not hold one cup of flour).
- Ineffective fallout flap.
- Advises 24 hours to recharge.
- Very noisy.

About the rest

- The Black & Decker Dustbuster Extreme is only OK at most cleaning tasks, and began to run out of charge before completing the car test.
- The Electrolux is mediocre at cleaning sand and gravel, and very poor at picking up pet hair.

- The Shop Vac doesn't have enough power to clean embedded sand from a car floor, and has an ineffective fallout flap.
- The Piranha is the only corded model in the test. This makes it less portable as you need

a power point and possibly an extension lead. On the other hand, it won't run out of battery power. It's very noisy and is poor at picking up fine material such as flour, which clogs the filter, stopping suction.

Multifunction, multi-cost

Don't be taken in by inexpensive printers – you'll pay big dollars in the long term.

nutshell

► To read the full story on multifunction printers, see the March/April 2009 issue of *CHOICE Computer*. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 (toll-free) or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

A multifunction printer that prints high-quality documents and glossy photos, as well as copies, scans and faxes, is a smart way to save space in your home office. However, it may not save you much else as ink costs can make them expensive to run.

The grey market

If you're overseas and spot cheap, genuine cartridges for your printer back home, you may be tempted to stock up and save money. However, manufacturers attach a chip that prevents you using the cartridge in printers sold in different countries, which ensures the price they set in Australia isn't undercut by the price they set elsewhere.

This prevents parallel importation, or the "grey market". Another effect of adding a chip is that third-party ink manufacturers have a much harder job competing. Because the brand manufacturers own the patents for the chips, third-party manufacturers cannot legally copy them. Consequently, consumers are forced to pay more.

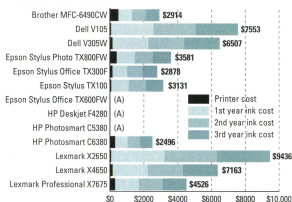
Unfortunately, due to the practice of chipping cartridges, along with some manufacturers naming their printers and cartridges differently in different countries, we cannot provide information on ink usage for three of the printers on test (an international joint test conducted in Europe), as shown in the graph, right.

Spend upfront to save later

At roughly \$20 per teaspoon, inkjet printer ink is expensive. If you want to save money on ink costs, you'll need to spend more upfront. In the graph below, our cost predictions over one to three years are based on a scenario of printing every day, for one year, five black-and-white one-page letters; three colour pages; and one photo.

Colour printing costs far more than black-and-white, so your costs will be lower if you don't print many photos or colourful documents. We haven't included paper costs, but you could add a cent per page for any black-and-white documents, and from 60c to \$2 for photos.

Printer ink costs



Using our formula, the most expensive printers over three years are the Lexmark X2650 and Dell V105, both of which are the cheapest to buy but would cost \$9436 and \$7553 respectively to run. The most efficient printer is the HP Photosmart C6380, which costs \$299 to buy, but over three years \$2496 to run – a saving of more than \$4000 over both Dell models and the Lexmark X2650 and X4650.

GRAPH NOTES

(A) Due to differences in ink cartridge models available overseas we cannot provide ink usage figures for this printer.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Printing: 35%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Scanning: 15%
- Copying: 15%
- Versatility: 5%
- Power: 5%
- Direct photo printing: 3%
- Networking: 2%

Price Recommended retail, January 2009.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTERS

Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall	Printing (%)	Ease of use (%)	Scanning (%)	Copying (%)	Versatility (%)	Power (%)	Direct photo printing (%)	Networking (%)	Price (\$)
HP Photosmart C6380	66	68	67	67	55	63	56	66	100	299
HP Photosmart C5380	64	68	67	69	54	63	52	69	30	219
Epson Stylus Photo TX800FW	63	66	45	70	64	79	57	82	75	399
Epson Stylus Office TX600FW	58	65	28	63	65	73	63	70	75	249
HP Deskjet F4280	55	61	56	58	49	30	62	na	30	69
Lexmark Professional X7675	52	53	37	57	54	79	51	56	75	299
Brother MFC-6490CW	52	49	44	63	45	69	50	60	100	499
Dell V305W	50	50	37	61	54	52	49	36	65	149
Lexmark X4650	49	50	35	59	54	52	49	44	65	169
Epson Stylus Office TX300F	42	52	20	59	42	46	9	na	30	149
Epson Stylus TX100	41	49	25	48	33	39	65	na	30	79
Dell V105	41	49	34	58	33	32	0	na	30	69
Lexmark X2650	40	48	32	56	34	32	0	na	30	69



Less clutter, less quality

If portability is more important than sound quality, these headphones may be a good fit.

nutshell

► While only one of these models has good sound quality, they are all more convenient than wired headphones.

► Always be careful of the volume used on listening devices, as hearing damage can occur at levels above 85dB – the sound of a busy street.

If you find yourself turning up the TV to compensate for hearing shortcomings, or listening to music only you enjoy, headphones are a great alternative to being told to keep the noise down. These wireless headphones use signals such as radio frequency (FM), infra-red, and even Bluetooth to broadcast the audio from a transmitter, or base station, to the headphones.

Unfortunately, you get lower audio quality with these models than with a good pair of wired headphones. Most of the models on test may generate an internal noise – so no matter your source, you'll hear a hiss.

You're unlikely to notice this if you are hard of hearing or turn up the sound, but for fine sounds you'll lose some quality. You can get much better quality sound from a pair of wired headphones in the same price range.

CHOICE tested nine wireless headphones, five of which use radio frequency, three infra-red and one Bluetooth, ranging from \$100 to \$450. While some claim to broadcast the signal up to 100 metres, we found none met their claims for range. As shown in the table, right, FM has the greatest claimed range, followed by Bluetooth and infra-red. ■

What to buy

72% Verbatim
41925

PRICE \$110

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall score.
- Very good rating for comfort.
- Very good rating for perceived weight.
- Excellent rating for standby energy use.
- Can be charged via USB or AC adapter.

BAD POINTS

- Borderline rating for ease of use of controls.
- Poor rating for ease of cleaning.
- Maximum usable range in testing was only four metres.



61% Sennheiser
RS 140

PRICE \$450

GOOD POINTS

- Two-year warranty.
- Multiple channels – allows users to change frequency.
- Best operational range result in this test.
- Charging cradle makes it easy to recharge.
- Controls are very easy to operate.
- Excellent rating for comfort.
- Very good rating for pressure points.
- Very good rating for security on the head.
- Good rating for ease of cleaning.

BAD POINTS

- Borderline rating for sound quality.
- Uses more than one watt on standby.



About the rest

- The Philips SBC HC8540 has the lowest range score and the Philips SHC 1300 is the least expensive.
- Both Sony products have good standby energy scores, but are let down by their audio performance scores.
- The Sennheiser RS 130 and Sony MDR-IF140K have good ease of use scores, but the Sennheiser is let down by its energy score.
- The Philips SBC HC8540 is the heaviest model, and the Sennheiser RS 120 has the second largest measured range at 45 metres.
- The Verbatim, and Philips models and the Sony MDR-IF140K do not come with a dock for charging – you need to connect a cable to recharge.

Product	Performance						Specifications						Features	
Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby energy score (%)	Range score (%)	Range (m, claimed / measured)	Earcup type	Headband / neckband	Transmitter type	Claimed battery life (hours)	Weight (g)*	Charging dock	Contact	Price (\$)
Verbatim 41925	72	74	62	100	56	10 / 4	On-ear, closed	Neck	BT	4	45		www.verbatim.com.au	110
Sennheiser RS 140	61	63	75	0	62	100 / 51	Over-ear, closed	Head	FM	23	291	✓	www.sennheiser.com	450
Philips SHC 1300	57	59	68	0	78	7 / 5.5	On-ear, closed	Head	IR	15	154		www.philips.com.au	100
Sennheiser RS 130	56	58	70	0	57	100 / 42	Over-ear, open	Head	FM	22	275	✓	www.sennheiser.com	350
Philips SBC HC8540	54	59	64	0	48	100 / 25	Over-ear, closed	Head	FM	15	331	✓	www.philips.com.au	250
Philips SBC HC8440	53	55	69	0	52	100 / 32	Over-ear, closed	Head	FM	15	224		www.philips.com.au	200
Sennheiser RS 120	52	51	68	0	59	100 / 45	On-ear, open	Head	FM	20	228	✓	www.sennheiser.com	250
Sony MDR-IF140K	42	17	70	77	78	7 / 5.5	On-ear, closed	Head	IR	60	126		www.sony.com.au	139
Sony MDR-IF240RK	41	18	69	70	66	7 / 4	On-ear, closed	Head	IR	35	128	✓	www.sony.com.au	229

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance: 55%
- Ease of use: 30%

- Standby score: 10%
- Range: 5%

Price Recommended retail, as of February 2009.

TABLE NOTES

* Includes batteries.

What to look for

WIRELESS HEADPHONE FEATURES

- **Headband / neckband** Headphones fit with a band that sits either across the top of your head or at the back of your neck. Try both types to see which is most comfortable. Only the Verbatim is a neckband style.
- **Transmitter type** Audio signals are transmitted via radio frequency (FM), infra-red (IR) or Bluetooth (BT). All but the Verbatim must use their supplied base to transmit the signal from the source, whether it's your stereo, TV or MP3 player. The Verbatim can be paired directly with a Bluetooth-enabled device without the supplied base.
- **Charging dock** A convenient feature that recharges the headphones when they are placed on the base. Half the models on test have this feature.
- **Multi-channel** allows different channels to be used. If two people use wireless headphones for different devices, such as a TV in one room and computer in another, they can be set to different channels so they don't interfere with each other. All the Sennheiser models and the Philips SBC HC8440 and SBC HC8540 have this feature.
- **Battery** Only the Sony MDR-IF140K and Philips SBC 1300 do not supply rechargeable batteries, but you can use your own rechargeable AAA batteries.



Earcup type This refers to closed and open headphones. Only the Sennheiser RS 120 and RS 130 are open headphones. Whether they sit on your ear or cover your ear entirely also defines the earcup type.



BLUETOOTH AND PORTABILITY

The Verbatim is the only model compact and mobile enough to plug into your phone (with a small base station in case your device is not Bluetooth enabled) or MP3 player. All other models are bulky in comparison, requiring a base station nearby. The Verbatim can be recharged by USB or its AC adapter, and exceeded its battery claim of four hours by 30 minutes. It is more likely to be found in the computer section of the electronics store than the audio or TV section. It lost points due to its range, but if you plan on using this model for its portability this is less likely to matter.

HOW WE TEST

Performance tests take into account internal noise, passive noise reduction, frequency response and total harmonic distortion.

Range is based on how close the product comes to its claimed range.

Ease of use is assessed on how easy the controls are to use, and how easy the headphones can be adjusted and cleaned. The headphones are also assessed for comfort.

Standby energy Our testers measure the energy consumption of the power adapter on standby. Where applicable, products may meet legal requirements even if we score them 0%; however we believe that if one model can maintain less than one watt on standby, then all the others should be able to as well.



Stable at the table

High chairs should be stable, sturdily built and safe.

nutshell

► Only three high chairs passed all our safety tests. One other chair had only minor failures and is worth considering.

Pumpkin purée on the parquetry should be the only kind of spill that happens during a child's meal time. Other spills, where the child falls from the high chair or it topples over, must be avoided at all costs. CHOICE put nine high chairs, as well as one junior chair intended for older children, to the test to find which are stable, sturdily built and safe, and which have all the right features to make feeding time comfortable for both you and your child.

In the table (page 62) we've separated the high chairs into three categories. "Recommended" chairs

(opposite) meet all our key safety tests; "worth considering" means the chair has only minor failures; and "not recommended" means the chair has at least one key safety failure. There are no scores for ease of use, but some comments are noted in the What to Buy profiles, opposite.

The Steelcraft, Bootiq and Love N Care chairs also present a risk of pinching for an adult folding or unfolding them, as they have moving or rotating parts that could trap a carelessly placed finger. >

What to look for

HIGH CHAIR ESSENTIALS

- **Five-point harness** (with shoulders, waist and crotch straps) helps prevent a child from falling or climbing from the seat. Shoulder straps that attach to the seat at shoulder height provide more effective restraint than ones that attach to the back of the waist strap. The crotch strap should be anchored close enough to the back that the child can't slip through one side. The buckles should be easy for you, but not your child, to release.
- **Construction** should be sturdy and robust enough to carry the weight of a child. Push on the seat and backrest to see if they squeak, sag, deform, move out of position or collapse.
- **Moving parts** shouldn't be able to pinch, crush or trap a child's finger, toe, limb or head (or the fingers of an adult folding or adjusting the chair). Check for sharp points along the edges of the chair and tray, and easily detachable parts (including stickers) that could pose a choking hazard.
- **Stability** Look for legs that spread outwards farther than all other parts of the chair.



Tray This should be secure when fitted but easy (for an adult) to remove, attach and adjust.

COMFORT AND EASE OF USE

- A **large seat** is useful as it will accommodate a toddler as well as a baby.
- **Reclining back or seat** Good for younger babies who can't sit upright for long.
- **Height and back adjustment** These should be easy for you, but not your child, to operate. The mechanism should be out of the child's reach and require some strength or dexterity to use.
- **Foldable** It should be easy to fold and unfold, and lock in its folded position.
- **Lightweight** if you'll regularly get the chair out and store it away again.
- **Footrest or leg support** is important and adjustable footrests are useful. All models on test have a footrest.

Castor wheels Useful for moving the chair around. They should have brakes that lock in position on at least two of them (the front or back set). If the chair doesn't have castors, check that it's light enough to move easily without them.

What to buy

Recommended



Childcare Stella

PRICE \$180

GOOD POINTS

- Height-adjustable and reclinable seat.
- Easy to move around with four castor wheels.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing to mention.



Inglesina Zuma

PRICE \$429

GOOD POINTS

- Height-adjustable and reclinable seat.
- No initial assembly required.

BAD POINTS

- Folding requires use of both hands and a foot.



Love N Care Futura

PRICE \$69

GOOD POINTS

- Light and easy to move.

BAD POINTS

- A person folding it could get their fingers caught in rotating or closing parts.

Check for sharp edges along the side of the high chair and tray, as well as easily detachable parts that may pose a choking hazard to your child.

JUNIOR CHAIRS

When your child has grown up a little and no longer needs a harness to sit safely, you could consider a tall junior chair as a replacement for the high chair. Such chairs are simply elevated child-sized seats intended to allow the youngster to sit at the dinner table with the family. They usually have a footrest so the child can sit comfortably without his or her legs dangling.

The high chair standard does not technically apply to chairs like these, but nevertheless we put one model – the IKEA Gasell [\$69], pictured – to the test to see how it performs. It fails the sideways and rearward stability tests, so a child in this chair who pushes away from the table could risk toppling.

While we wouldn't say the IKEA is unsafe, a high chair that passes the stability test and has a roomy seat and removable tray could be a better option for an older child at the dinner table.



About the rest

- The Steelcraft is worth considering. Holes under the tray pose a finger entrapment hazard, but this is only a minor risk.
- The Bloom failed a strength test; the tray detached and was damaged. The tray is also difficult to attach and remove.
- The Bootiq is unstable rearward. It has holes on the armrest (when the tray is not attached) that could trap little fingers, and a person folding the chair could get his or her fingers caught in rotating or closing parts. The harness shoulder straps are anchored at waist rather than shoulder level, making the harness more prone to tangling.
- The Jolly Kidz is unstable sideways. Backrest gaps pose a limb entrapment hazard; it requires a significant amount of assembly and the seat height is fiddly to adjust. It comes with a waist strap only rather than full five-point harness, and the waist strap has no definite anchor point. While the instructions show the attachment of a five-point harness, there are no obvious attachment points on the chair for this.
- The Mother's Choice poses a finger entrapment hazard between the side of the seat back and the armrest when adjusting the seat recline to its most upright position, and also between the side of the seat and the tray. Its tray insert is hard to remove.
- The Valco Baby is unstable rearward and forward, and poses a limb entrapment hazard between the seat back and armrest when adjusting the seat recline to its most upright position.



CHOICE ONLINE

To see how stringently we test high chairs, go to www.choice.org.au/highchairs.

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on 02 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD ■ Heinz Australia has recalled **Heinz BBQ Sauce with Honey and Black Pepper**, 370mL plastic bottle, best before 19/11/10.

The problem It contains possible allergens wheat and soy, which aren't declared on the labelling.

What to do Don't eat it if you have an allergy to wheat or soy. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD ■ Heinz Australia has recalled **Heinz Dijon Mustard Sauce with Orange**, 370mL plastic bottle, best before 19/11/10, batch code 3248, sold at Woolworths only.

The problem It contains possible allergens egg and milk, which aren't declared on the labelling.

What to do Don't eat it if you have an allergy to egg or milk. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CLEANING PRODUCT ■ Rocochem Inc has recalled **Rocochem Caustic Soda**, 500g plastic bottle with a white cap, barcode number 9312852217965, sold between June 2007 and January 2009. Products with codes from 6 January 2007 to 31 January 2009 are affected, and the production code can be found on the back label of the bottle.

The problem The "arm" on the cap doesn't sufficiently lock on the lug of some bottles, making it non-child-resistant, a concern given the possible consequences of coming into contact with the corrosive chemical that can cause burns and eye damage.

What to do Stop using it and store out of reach of children, ensuring the cap is secured tightly. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CHRISTMAS DECORATION ■ Spotlight Group has recalled **Sitting Beaded Leg Santa and Reindeer**, sold between 1 September 2008 and 25 November 2008.

The problem It doesn't comply with product safety standards, and small parts could pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to your nearest Spotlight store for a refund.

MOBILE PHONE BATTERY ■ i-mate has recalled **Battery for the i-mate JAMA 101 Mobile phone**, sold between April 2008 and January 2009 with i-mate JAMA handsets, or as accessories for i-mate JAMA 101. The affected batteries can be identified by the model name "i-mate JAMA" printed in blue on the battery label. Batteries that have "i-mate JAMA 101" printed on the battery aren't affected.

The problem The batteries generate excessive heat under certain conditions and could lead to a fire.

What to do Stop using it. Email recall@imate.com with your name, address, phone number, the IEC P/N and serial number of the battery, and the IMEI number of the mobile phone. A replacement battery will be sent to you, along with a reply paid satchel to return the recalled battery.

EVAPORATIVE COOLER ■ Brivis Australia has recalled **Brivis Contour Evaporative Cooler and Brivis Profiler Evaporative Cooler**, with serial numbers 447638 to 559848, sold in Australia between 1 August 2001 and 31 October 2003.

The problem The starting device in these units may fail and property damage or personal injury could result.

What to do If you've had a Brivis evaporative cooler installed between 1 August 2001 and 31 October 2003, stop using it. Call 1800 754 553 or go to www.briviscoolerwork.com.au to make arrangements for repairs to be carried out.

ROLLER DOOR COMPONENT ■ Airport Doors has recalled the **KL278 Aluminium Bottom Rail** installed on **Airport Doors Roller Doors**, manufactured between 10 December 2007 and 12 August 2008 in SA and Victoria.

The problem If the roller door is thrown open, it may cause the door to run past the stops, potentially causing injury.

What to do Consumers with affected doors should have been contacted by Airport Doors and will have a package sent to rectify the problem.

CHOICE Shopper

Find the best deal on laundry and kitchen appliances, home entertainment, cameras, printers, computers and cars. Call 1300 360 655 with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number.

TOY ■ Honeybee Toys has recalled **Selecta Rosali Pram Chain**, available for sale from 11 November 2007 to 30 January 2008.

The problem It doesn't comply with the mandatory safety standard for toys.

What to do Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TOY ■ Tupperware Australia has recalled **Tupperware Shape-O Maraca**, a rattle-shaped toy, featuring a blue and red globe-like shape with star, square and various other shaped cut-outs, with a yellow handle. Inside the globe are various shaped plastic parts. It was distributed as a bonus gift with the larger "Shape-O" toy, which has been available since February 2007, and as a gift for people attending Tupperware's February 2007 session.

The problem The handle poses a choking hazard to young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of children. Post it (free of charge), to Reply Paid 105733, (Tupperware Australia Pty Ltd, PO Box 111, Ferntree Gully, Vic 3156, and a replacement product will be sent to you. For more information call 1800 887 737.

BABY WALKER ■ easyforbuy has recalled **easyforbuy Baby Walker**. The following models are affected: Buffalo baby walker, model 807; Music panel baby walker, model 008; Music panel baby walker, model 009; Music panel baby walker, model 002; Duck music panel baby walker with control handle, model 913; Duck music panel baby walker with control handle, model 904; and Beetle music panel baby walker, model 180.

The problem The labelling doesn't comply with the mandatory safety standard for baby walkers, and some do not contain a braking system to prevent babies from falling down stairs.

What to do Stop using them and destroy them. For a refund, call Jeffrey Wang on 0422 874 382, or email easybuy_@yahoo.com.au.

DRINK BOTTLE ■ Kathmandu has recalled **Kathmandu Active Series Drink Bottle**, 500mL and 750mL, sold between 18 January 2009 and 25 January 2009.

The problem The pop top can be removed, posing a potential choking hazard to young children.

What to do Stop using it. Return it to your nearest Kathmandu store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 333 484.

SCOOTER ■ Invacare Australia has recalled **Discovery Scooters**, product codes HS-895-RD2 (red), HS-895-B1 (blue) and HS-895-SG1 (silver), with serial numbers between 086GD0001 and 086GD0035, with ARTG number 119338. They've been sold since April 2008.

The problem They may have a problem with their transaxles.

What to do Invacare will contact affected owners.

MOTOR VEHICLE ■ Toyota Motor Corporation Australia has recalled **Toyota Yaris NCP90, NCP91 and NCP93**. The VIN ranges of the affected vehicles are as follows: WM1. JTD. NCP90. VDS JW9*3#. VIS 05000014-05064618. KW9*3#. 00001016-00015500. 02000007-02012428. 05000016-05064458. NCP91. JT9*3#. 05000849-05120127. KT9*3#. 00002186-00006205. 02000000-02004712. 05008853-05120035. NCP93. BT9*3#. 01000159-01151646. **Note:** Not all vehicles within the above range were imported into Australia. "Airbags fitted to vehicle, can be 0 or 2 or 6.#check digit (alpha or numeric). Affected vehicles were produced between 19 August 2005 and 9 April 2007.

The problem On certain Yaris NCP90, NCP91 and NCP93 vehicles, an insulator pad was incorrectly installed underneath both of the front seat belt retractors which are located in the centre pillars. These pads could be damaged in the event of a collision, and could lead to pad igniting.

What to do Toyota will write to affected owners.

+ HEALTH CARE

The right medicine?

CHOICE believes more extensive health care reforms are still needed.

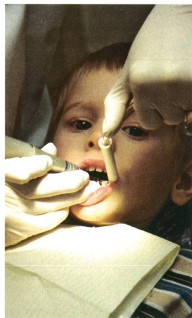
In February 2009, following a comprehensive review of the health system in Australia, the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission released its interim report containing 116 proposals for health care reform. The following are key proposals of relevance to consumers.

- Establishment of multidisciplinary primary health centres to bring together a range of health professionals in one place and improve consumer access.
 - Give people with chronic diseases the option to register with one medical practice (their doctor would then coordinate the services they need to manage their condition).
 - Consumer-controlled electronic health records.
 - A new dental scheme to be funded by an increase in the Medicare Levy.
 - A national health promotion and prevention agency, health literacy education in schools and workplace health and wellness programs to enhance people's ability to manage their own health.
 - Specific measures to tackle health inequalities for indigenous Australians, people with mental illness and people living in rural and remote Australia.
- In our submission to the review, CHOICE

supported many of these directions. However, we believe the report has not gone far enough in some places. The commission has given little consideration to whether we have the best mix of public and private funding in Australia, and funding mix can be a significant source of inequity.

Many dental and consumer groups have questioned the effectiveness of the proposed dental scheme. We believe it is not likely to overcome the current problem of low-income earners having poor access to dental care.

For more discussion of the commission's proposals and to read more about CHOICE's views, go to www.choice.com.au/healthreform. ■



CHOICE believes the proposed dental scheme is not likely to overcome problems low-income earners have in getting access to dental care.

+ CONSUMER SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

What about your social responsibility?

CHOICE works hard to help consumers make informed, ethical purchasing decisions.

Australia's Corporate Social Responsibility Index defines CSR as "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development, while improving the quality of life of the workforce, their families and the local community and society at large". The idea that companies have a social responsibility to ensure a positive impact on the environment, community, consumers and their workers is becoming increasingly mainstream within the business community.

But what about "consumer social responsibility" – consumers taking into account their own ethical concerns about the environment, labour conditions, fair trade or animal welfare when deciding what to buy?

Recent US research suggests more than 80% of consumers consider the environment when making purchases. In a 2008 CHOICE survey, a little fewer than 50% of respondents told us they think ethical issues such as overseas working conditions are important when choosing major appliances, high-tech electrical goods, clothing and baby products (CHOICE, July 2008). But despite this concern, much lower numbers of consumers surveyed (between 4% and 8%) put ethical considerations in their top three purchase criteria.

Although available data suggests the total amount spent on ethical consumption remains low, those parts that can be measured are growing rapidly. In the absence of Australian figures, ethical clothing purchases in the UK increased by 76% in one year and ethical investment by 18%.

Part of the challenge for consumers is finding trusted information about the ethical features of products. And except in popular categories, such as fair trade coffee and chocolate, finding good quality ethical products in major retailers can be difficult.

To help consumers more easily put their money where their values are, CHOICE believes industry, government and consumer organisations need to work together to ensure ethical claims can be trusted and competitive ethical products are readily available. We've been working on misleading environmental claims for some time (see www.choice.com.au/greenwatch) and are keen to hear your views on other types of ethical consumption. Tell us what you think by emailing us at campaigns@choice.com.au. ■

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* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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